

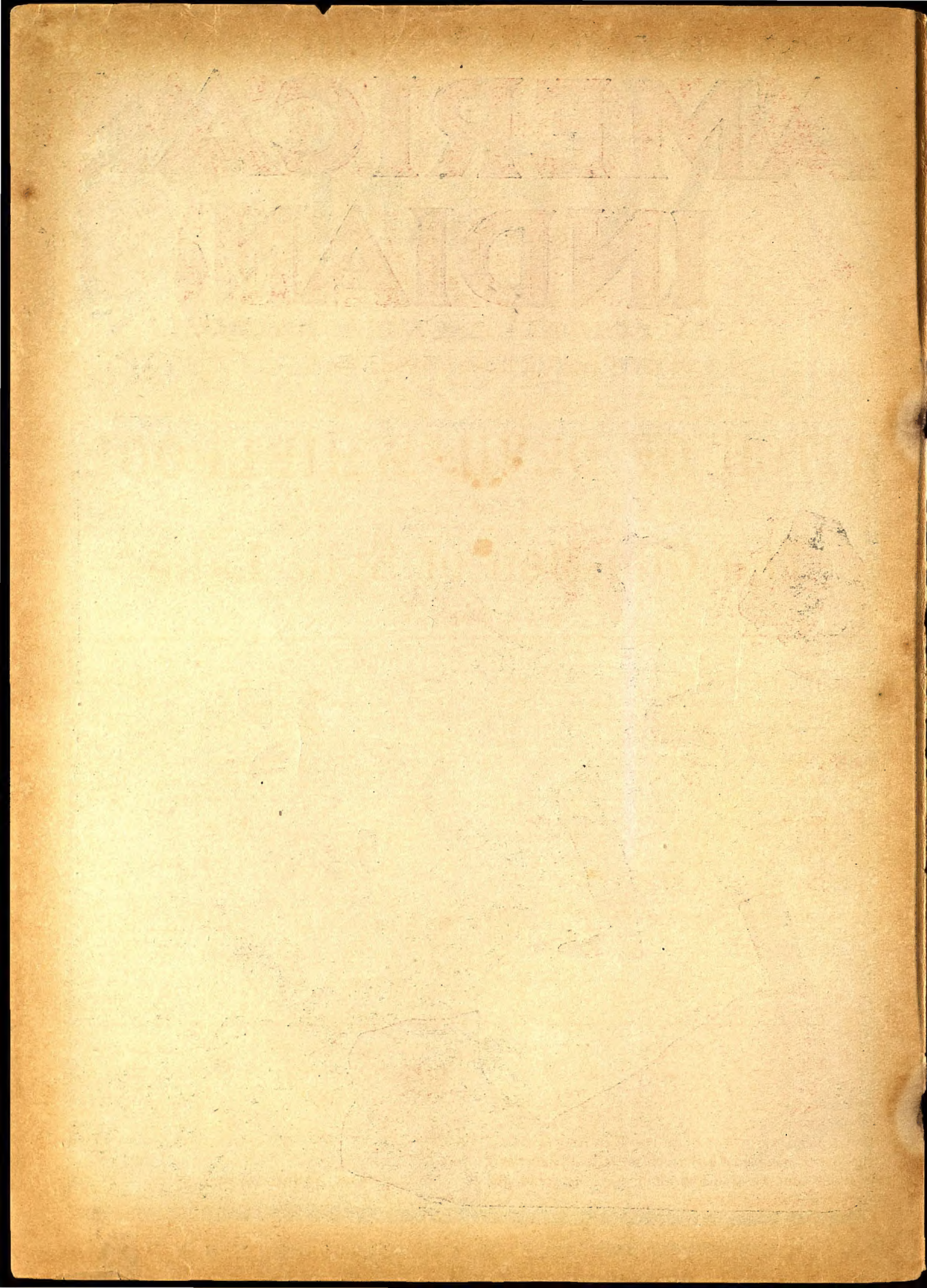
EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

WITCH OF DEVIL WHIRLPOOL





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WITCH OF DEVIL WHIRLPOOL, *or* The Gun-Men of Split Lake

By Col. Spencer Dair

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

THE WITCH OF DEVIL WHIRLPOOL—This aged hag whose career began in El Paso, Texas, as proprietress of a dance-hall, and ended in the solitary cabin where she and her only son were carrying on the criminal business of manufacturing and printing bogus bonds, supposed to have been issued by various South American governments, with her dying breath placed a curse upon a famous outlaw whose career of blood and disaster blazed for many years across Missouri, in the "Seventies."

LONG GREEN JOE PHILLIPS—A criminal who in early days was a bank-note and bank-bond engraver and who joined with his mother the Witch, in the work of manufacturing bogus securities. He died like a dog by the revolver of an outlaw leader.

BURTON GOODRICH—A wealthy resident of Split Lake, Missouri, who, desirous of securing a county seat for his town, engaged two outlaws to fight his battle for him and ended in becoming their prisoner, held for heavy ransom; and whose narrow escape from death was due to the indomitable services of a detective who was engaged in uprooting the band of outlaws who held Goodrich prisoner.

MAXWELL HYDE—This indomitable and fearless man, in his younger days a gun-man and outlaw of fame, in this story continues his attempt to round up the outlaws who were devastating a chain of Missouri Banks which

had formed themselves into the Western and South-western Bankers Guild, and had employed Hyde to protect them from looting robbers.

LINCOLN ORRIN—President of the Savings Association of Rikers Falls, Missouri. He learned that an outlaw had several strings to his bow and was forced at the point of a bandit's revolver to pay twenty-five thousand dollars in gold coin for this knowledge.

BIG BILL—A certain famous bandit disguised himself in this character and before his identity was discovered, tricked Maxwell Hyde, the detective.

GIRARD RANDALL—Post-master at Split Lake, Missouri. His fight with an outlaw leader is part of the history of Missouri.

LUCAS BAILEY—President of the village of Split Lake, Missouri. He played a man's part in the arrest of a bandit, and it was not his fault that the bandit escaped.

DEPUTY UNITED STATES MARSHAL WILLIAM STOWERS—For the space of a few hours he held in custody an outlaw on whose head lay thousands of dollars' reward, but when victory seemed within his grasp, the outlaw leader escaped by a daring and desperate deed, leaving Stowers to mourn the loss of his reward.

GABRIEL HAWES—A farmer who fought a window battle with two outlaws secreted in his barn, and lived to tell the tale.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEARCH FOR THE OUTLAWS.

The outlaw stole toward a chink in the plain board wall of the great barn.

In his hand he held a huge revolver, and avoiding with great caution making much noise in the rustling hay about him, he slouched along until he could get a better view of the barnyard.

All appeared safe to his scrutinizing eyes.

The desperado strolled back to where his companion lay upon a mound of hay trying to staunch a wound in his left arm, which was bleeding freely.

"Did you see anybody?" questioned the wounded bandit.

"No one there," replied the first outlaw. "How's your arm?"

"Oh, pretty good," came the quick reply. "My opinion is that the bullet went through the flesh part and hasn't hit a bone. As soon as I get this bandage on and stop the bleeding, I'll be all right."

"You'd better hurry up. We want to get away from here while there's a chance."

The wounded desperado to whom this remark was made winked and shook his head.

"What are we going to get away on?" he asked. "Those chaps got our horses."

The first outlaw laughed in a sneering fashion, as he pointed in the direction of the rear of the barn where the stamping of horses' hoofs could be faintly heard amid the innumerable sounds of fowl, of ducks, and of hogs that center about the barnyard of the average country-farmer.

"Say, there's some pretty good cattle back there," smiled the outlaw. "Do you not hear them stamping, ready for a race? Why man, don't you see all we have to do is to get downstairs, sneak a couple of horses and then make our get-away. If we go fast enough and are quick enough, we ought to do it without anyone discovering us."

"How many are following us?"

"Five or six, I guess."

"We ought to be swift enough to handle five or six men."

"I guess we are. Only you never can tell. You follow me and we'll go down and get those horses and get away."

The two outlaws tiptoed their way down to the lower floor and soon had saddled and bridled two horses which they led out into the quiet barnyard, surprising broods of chickens and many vagrant ducks who made protests after their kind.

"If it wasn't for bringing some one here, I'd like to shoot that fat rooster, that's crowing over there along with those cackling hens," laughed one of the desperadoes. "Still I guess there isn't anybody at home."

The words had hardly issued from his mouth, when from an upper chamber of a substantial looking farm-house across the narrow roadway separating it from the barn, came a white puff of smoke.

As the smoke pushed its way out into the air, the ring of a rifle sounded and the hat of one of the outlaws flew from his head as a bullet struck it.

The two desperadoes dodged behind the edge of the barn out of range, the man whose hat had been hit crying lustily.

"I guess there is someone in that house after all," he said. "If I was dead sure how many they had, I'd get in to the game myself and see how many I could shoot, but as it is, I think we'd better keep out of range. The farmer up there is probably shooting at us."

"I don't know whether or not he's a farmer, but he shot exceedingly well," laughed the other man, who was crouching and trying to peek around a corner of the barn. "We're in a pretty pickle. We've got those horses saddled and bridled, and we can't get at them because they're in the line of fire. I don't like to be plugged at by any farmer, from the cover of a window."

"We've got to get the horses somehow! They're the only decent horses in this infernal stable. I don't see what to do—yes I do—yes I do!"

The speaker tiptoed himself around the barn in the opposite direction, and started to execute the plan he had in mind. He had hitched the two horses to a post in the center of the barnyard. The position was about one hundred and fifty feet from the farm-house in which lurked the man whose rifle shot had so nearly ended disastrously for the desperadoes. How to get the horses was indeed a puzzle. The animals were tied together by a bit of rope reaching from each bridle, and this rope was twined once around a hitching post of wood.

A man could cross in twenty steps the space between the point at which the outlaw was standing, shielded from a shot by a pile of wood, to where the horses were, but while he was taking those twenty steps, he would be directly in the line of fire from the farm-house window. It was a hundred to one that a man who knocked a hat spinning from a head at his first shot, would not miss the outlaw a second time.

The outlaw crept along behind his bulwark of the pile of wood until he was directly opposite the horses, and at the same time was entirely shielded from any shot from the open window.

"I've got a plan," the crouching man said. "Now look out and catch the horses when I cut them loose."

"What're you going to do?" asked the other man.

"Never you mind. You look out for the horses."

The speaker drew his revolver from his belt, and as he knelt down he rested it upon a stick of wood in front of him and then through a chink in the wood-pile, saw that he was within range of the two tied horses.

The outlaw sighted along his revolver with great caution.

At first, he appeared not to like the position he was in, so he laid down his weapon for a moment, made himself a nice easy seat from the wood and then sighted again.

This time he appeared to be better satisfied and after crying to his companion a second time to be ready, he took long and careful aim at the rope which confined the two horses. As his revolver bullet cut the rope in twain, the two horses, hearing the noise behind them made by the weapon, darted forward. As soon as they were between the open window and the second outlaw, that individual dashed out securing one

end of the severed rope, and quickly led the two liberated horses back out of range. Chuckling to himself, he awaited the return of his companion.

"That certainly was a dandy shot," cried the man who held the horses when his companion returned. In a moment the two men mounted, dug their heels into the horses' sides and whirled away down the road, and with great speed disappeared over a hill and up toward the town of Split Lake, Missouri.

Farmer Gabriel Hawes, considerably disturbed at the disappearance of the two outlaws along with his best saddle horses, remained for a long time under cover, fearing that the two men whom he had seen riding away might have companions secreted in the barn who would kill him, in case he left his place of concealment.

An hour thus passed and during that period, the outlaws placed ten miles at least between themselves and Farmer Hawes' barn where they had been in hiding.

At the end of this hour a dozen men, headed by a tall, broad-shouldered man whose sunburned face proclaimed his outdoor life and at the same time concealed his real age, came hurrying down the highway white and parched under the afternoon sun, and drew up in front of Farmer Hawes' house. The farmer looked at the man in the lead and recognizing him promptly stuck his head out of the window, hailing the new arrival.

"Hello, Maxwell Hyde!" cried the farmer. "Be you huntin' fer them fellers?"

"I surely am. What's become of 'em?" replied the newcomer.

Maxwell Hyde was in the employ of the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild. As has often been stated previously, his early life had been passed in the ranks of the outlaws, but with the passing of gun-men he had joined the forces of law and order, and now he was trying to weed out the criminal element from Missouri, Texas, Mississippi and Tennessee, as agent of the chain of banks dotting this territory in the "Seventies."

Although a hard drinking, hard-fighting man in his young days, handy with his weapons, Hyde had cut out the hard drinking and was now the pick of the forces he represented, for he was intelligent, generous, bold and shrewd.

In this particular case, Hyde was heading a posse of men intent upon capturing or exterminating the two desperadoes who had now an hour's start upon them.

"Who be them fellers?" asked Farmer Hawes of the man whose career has just been rapidly sketched.

"I don't really know," replied Hyde. "They rode into Woodstown yesterday morning, and spent the day in the place having a good time of it. They were drinking pretty heavily in the town and they got into

a muss—never mind what about—I'd been tracing—well, never mind who I'd been tracing—so I rushed after them with a posse and here I am. How long since those fellows were here?"

"About an hour," replied Farmer Hawes.

The farmer was a Missouri man and he knew all about the little hamlet of Woodstown, a little raw boom town of unpainted boards and tents, which had sprung up almost over night near a place called Devil Whirlpool on the shores of the Mississippi River.

The population of Woodstown was of the typical frontier variety and everybody around believed it was going to some day become a great commercial metropolis.

It was sixteen miles from this town to the farm of Gabriel Hawes. Twenty-five miles in the opposite direction toward which the outlaws had vanished, was the rival town of Split Lake.

Split Lake, also of the boom variety, was deeply embroiled in war with Woodstown and between the two rivals turbulent history had been made.

In fact each town had been the scene of many bloody conflicts, and the entire country in these stirring days of land boom had become involved, the Split Lake faction vowing that no other site should be selected as the county seat; while Woodstown people as bitterly vowed that they would be obliterated from the face of the earth before the county seat went to their rival. It was surprising how many lives had been lost and how many people badly wounded in this fight for the honor of the town's selection as the county seat and at the time this history begins, there had been a new element brought into the campaign by the town of Split Lake, whose Board of Trade had sent over to Independence, Missouri and had hired several desperate men known as gun-fighters, to assist in the projected plan of cleaning up the rival hamlet.

There had been a meeting in Woodstown on the day spoken of by Maxwell Hyde, when citizens of the place had passed resolutions offering fifty thousand dollars for a new Town Hall, in case a final selection was made of their village as the county seat.

The two desperadoes who had escaped from Farmer Hawes' barn had been sent over to attend this meeting and to see that the resolutions, when presented, were not adopted. They had fatally well performed their part. Just as the resolutions had been read, one of the outlaws, had drawn his revolver and shot an unoffending citizen, and instantly killed him. This shot in a community where men wore revolvers openly and used them momentarily, caused every man present to draw his weapon and to begin firing indiscriminately at the two outlaws.

The desperadoes being trained gun-men, having effected the purpose for which they had come to Woodstown, that being to prevent the passing of the resolution, returned the shots rapidly, and as they had plan-

ned the campaign, did great execution. After a five minutes' hot fight they had mounted their horses and started to ride away at the best speed they could muster.

Behind them lay four dead men, and half a dozen wounded citizens of Woodstown attested their quickness with their weapons. They themselves had suffered only one wound between them, and that, although painful, was not at all dangerous. They had, however, by this dastardly method, secured the success of the mission they were upon for while the resolutions had been partly read, they were not passed and they had not, therefore, been sanctioned as an official act of the town, and the bribe of a new Town Hall building, so far as Woodstown was concerned, had not been officially offered in the race for county seat honors.

In the two factions leading the county seat war which had become famous over all that part of Missouri at this time, Maxwell Hyde had no interest. Working for his employers, the Bankers Guild, he had been watching a band of well-known outlaws who lived near Independence, Missouri, in his endeavor to secure evidence by which he could convict them of certain crimes of which he knew. He would have been in the town of Woodstown when the town meeting had been held had he not started away on a clue which had proved to be false. Thus Maxwell Hyde was absent from the hamlet when the two desperadoes arrived within it, and during the bloody scenes they had instigated. He had not witnessed their escape, but had come into town just as the outlaws had left it and as almost everybody in the place knew Hyde's reputation for bravery, he had been requested to lead the posse and had accepted the onerous position. The leading merchants of the place, the lawyers and the bankers and in fact all of the substantial element of the town, had hurried to Maxwell Hyde's hotel and had pleaded with him to do what he could to arrest the miscreants who had shot up the place.

The result had been an acceptance on the part of Hyde of the dangerous honor, and he had formed a posse of the younger men of the town and had hurried after the outlaws.

The desperadoes, however, had had a long start and would have escaped had it not been for a young man named Tom Holloway who was walking across a field in the outskirts of the hamlet of Woodstown. He saw the flying outlaws, heard the sounds of shots and screams echoing from the main street of the town, and taking a long chance upon being right, he rested his rifle upon the top rail of a fence and in two seconds had killed one of the horses ridden by the outlaws, and would have killed the men themselves had his weapon not clogged. By the time he had it working again, both men had galloped away on the same horse.

The horse ridden by the outlaws had broken down just as they reached Farmer Hawes' farm and they had crept into the big barn and secreted themselves in the hay, so that one of them could attend to his injured arm, while they planned some method of securing new horses and making their escape.

These various points Maxwell Hyde quickly pieced out with the knowledge he already possessed as to the actions of the outlaws, and soon after, having asked the farmer if he had been injured, was leading his posse out into the open again, knowing, however, that the outlaws had a tremendous lead on him and that a stern chase was proverbially a long one.

"Hey, Maxwell," shouted Farmer Hawes, just as the leader of the posse was starting away, "did ye know them two outlaws?"

Maxwell Hyde winked as he galloped away without answering.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIDE OF THE OUTLAWS.

The two desperadoes hurried away at top speed and canvassed in their own minds the deeds of the day just passed.

The leader of the expedition was no other than the famous outlaw Jesse James.

Riding just behind him came a no less famous desperado than his brother, Frank James. The two men, Jesse with his brown eyes and hair, and Frank, more slightly built than his brother, and whose light hair and blue eyes had made him known from one end of Missouri to the other, had been for many years terrorizing that part of the country.

They had been train-robbers, bank burglars, express car looters, and bad men for years, and although they had been chased from place to place by detectives, they had never been captured, because in those days the towns were small, remote from each other, with the country about them wild and practically unsettled, so that when the two men rode away from town, they were blotted out of existence in the wilderness until they saw fit to issue again at some civilized point.

"Well Jesse," cried Frank with his sunny smile, "we got away with it, didn't we?"

"So far, yes," replied Jesse. "Those fellows are after us, of course, and I hear that our old friend Maxwell Hyde has been seen about that town. I suppose Hyde will head a posse that will try to catch us."

"Well, let 'em try it. What do we care? Did you get your money from those people over in Split Lake before you started out?"

"You bet I did. They paid me twenty-five hundred dollars to stop that meeting over in Woodstown. They didn't want to pay me any money in advance but I told 'em they had to. I told 'em I wouldn't go unless they put up the cash first. They kicked a little bit about giving me money before I turned the trick, but I told 'em Jesse James's word was good enough for them to take and if they didn't pay me, I wouldn't stir a step toward bracing up the meeting they were so anxious to have stopped."

The men winked and grinned at each other as they pulled their horses to a little slower pace, and Frank James remarked with a great deal of unctious in his tone that he was tickled to death to see that they had carried out their plans, all right, and that the list of dead in Woodstown was large enough to please anybody.

"I thought you were crazy," Frank said to his brother, "to start shooting when you did. I thought sure some of those fellows would get us. But you got away with it after all, Jesse, and I congratulate you."

Jesse held up his wounded arm and pointed at it with a smirk.

"They got one bullet into me," said Jesse, "but I cut it out with my penknife as it had gone clean through the fleshy part and just laid in under the skin on the other side. You needn't worry over my arm,

however, because while it's pretty sore, it won't stop me from hauling off another little plan I've got."

"Well, if you've got the bullet out, your arm will heal up all right," replied Frank. "Only don't get into any more fool plans, Jesse. Remember there's a posse chasing us and we have got to hit some kind of a cover or they'll get us. If they get us, I—I don't want to think what would happen to us."

The outlaws rode along at a steady gate for some time, Jesse not answering. He finally, however, detailed his plan to his brother. Although he had been employed by the Board of Trade in Split Lake, Jesse argued in his own mind that after he had been paid for his work, he was as free to work against the Board as he was to work for it.

"We got our cash off the Board of Trade," Jesse explained further to Frank, "and I am going to go back and get some more money off those fellows."

"You are!" returned Frank, his eyes opening in his amazement. "Do you mean to tell me that you'll have the nerve to go back to Split Lake and hold it up just after you've got their cash for going and sticking up another town?"

"Why, Frank, there's no sentiment in business," replied Jesse.

"But look here! Would it be safe? With that posse behind us, chasing us into Split Lake, we would be liable to get ourselves into serious trouble in case the posse caught up with us."

"No danger in that!" replied Jesse. "The posse will think we've gone back among our Split Lake friends, and even Maxwell Hyde isn't brave enough to lead a posse into the jaws of the Split Lake people. I think we'll be perfectly safe to go up and try a couple of heats with our former friends."

"Well, just as you say, Jesse. I'm in with you all right. Only don't get rash. 'The pitcher that goes often to the well,' you know."

"I'm not going to get broken this time, my boy. Don't you be afraid," replied Jesse.

"All right! Lead on! I'll follow you."

When the two men progressed a little further on the way, Jesse swung into a road that was leading directly to Split Lake. This hamlet was so extremely young that it did not support a bank, but Jesse made up his mind that his objective point would be to go to the home of the President of the Split Lake Board of Trade, whose name was Burton Goodrich, and see if he could not induce him to part with some money that Jesse felt sure he possessed. The outlaw's plan was to ride directly to the home of Goodrich and force him to give up all the wealth he had in his house, for he thought that Goodrich, who had the reputation of being a money lender would probably be in possession of enough cash and jewels to make the projected raid worth while.

The two men soon reached Split Lake and hurried to the home of Goodrich, which was situated on the outskirts of the little village. They were not stopped by anybody in the town because everybody knew that they were in the employ of the Board of Trade and had gone over to Woodstown as paid gun-men representing Split Lake, and so instead of being detained, smiles and applause greeted their progress.

Jesse had counted upon this.

"Everybody seems glad to see us here, don't they?" grinned Jesse to his brother in a low tone. "If they

really knew what we are going to do they wouldn't be so happy about it."

Burton Goodrich, who was seated on his front steps when the outlaws arrived at his home, greeted the two gun-men with every possible display of enthusiasm and pleasure.

Jesse masked his intention behind an affable smile, and although he instructed his brother not to dismount but to hold his horse and await his coming with weapon ready if necessary, he gave no hint of his design while he extended his hand toward Burton Goodrich, as the latter eagerly asked for a report upon what had happened at Woodstown.

"Did you keep those fellows from passing the resolution?" asked Goodrich.

"You bet we did!" replied Jesse.

"Tell me what happened!"

"They tried to start the resolution game, and a tall fellow began reading it, when I thought it was time to end matters without any further delay. There was a young fellow sitting in front of me, and so I pulled my gun and shot him through the head. When I hit him he didn't appear to feel as if he wanted to vote on the resolutions, and then everybody got busy and we had quite a scrap. I hope they've got a good undertaker in that town, because there's a lot of work for him to do, and I hope they've got a good florist for he can do a good business with the families of the deceased—there are a lot of 'em there—I don't know how many!"

"Good!" replied Mr. Goodrich. "That's the kind of work that counts! Do you know that I would double the money again and shoot up all that there is in Woodstown rather than have this place of Split Lake lose the county seat. But say, Jesse, what made you come back here? I thought the bargain was that you would return home after you had stopped the passing of those resolutions. You see our Board of Trade don't want it known that you in any way dealt with us. We don't want to have it put up to us that we hired you to go over there. Don't you think that those fellows in Woodstown will be liable to suspect something if they hear that you rode right back from that fight to us?"

A gleam of amusement and yet of menace crept into the eyes of the outlaw leader.

"Those fellows over in Woodstown will not suspect—they won't suspect any more than you do here."

"What d'you mean?" queried Goodrich in a puzzled tone.

"They won't suspect in Woodstown," Jesse returned, "that you hired me to go over there, and you don't suspect here that I have returned to do a little more business with you."

Amazement was depicted upon the face of Burton Goodrich. A frontier man like himself could scent a deed of blood quickly. His fiery spirit took alarm immediately, though he was a brave man, and his right hand started in a quick travel toward his hip pocket, where there nestled the inevitable revolver.

A man in those days might forget his collar and his necktie, but he never forgot his revolver.

"Don't do that!" drawled the smiling tones of Jesse. "I don't allow anybody to make motions like that. Those are funny motions and you might accidentally touch that gun, and then I'd have to kill you!"

Although Jesse made no motion to draw his own weapon, his words were enough. Goodrich made no further motion toward his revolver, but instead his

face turned white, and he folded his hands tensely upon his knees, staring at Jesse meanwhile with fear and astonishment.

"What—what—what—what—d'ye want?" he stammered.

"I want money!" Jesse replied in even tones.

"Money!" howled Goodrich. "I haven't got any money! I haven't got more than a few hundred dollars in the whole house. That won't pay you."

"Well, I suppose you can get some, can't you?"

Burton Goodrich thought quickly. If he could only temporize with the situation that confronted him, he thought possibly he could manage to secure assistance. So with that end in view he began playing for time.

"Do you think this is fair?" he asked. "I don't keep much money in the house, and while I might be able to get some from some of my friends, if you hold me up here, I can do nothing."

This plan did not appeal to Jesse at all. The outlaw knew that if he allowed Goodrich to communicate with his friends, the result would be a good deal like stirring up a bee-hive, and Jesse's one idea was to escape with all the plunder he could accumulate without too much trouble. So rapidly deciding that a horse that would not drink should be made to drink, he began shaping up in his mind a plan whereby he could get at Mr. Goodrich's bank roll and still not allow him to communicate with his friends.

"No," snapped Jesse, "you cannot go out of here and get into touch with your friends. I'll tell you what I'll let you do."

"What's that?" questioned Goodrich with white lips.

"I see over on your desk there pen, ink and paper. I can dictate a pretty good letter. You get busy and I'll tell you what to write."

"Before you sit down at that desk," added Jesse, "you hold up your hands."

Silently Goodrich obeyed the outlaw's bidding. Jesse quickly removed the revolvers from the older man's pockets, and then, after he had searched the desk to make sure no weapon was concealed in it, he motioned the great man of the village of Woodstown to seat himself at the desk and begin writing. Goodrich scowled but sat down and dipped a pen in ink, at the same time drawing a sheet of paper toward him.

"Now, we're all ready," cried Jesse. "Let's begin!"

Goodrich swore as he turned toward Jesse, awaiting the letter the outlaw was about to dictate.

"To my Friends and Fellow-Workers in the Board of Trade of Woodstown, Missouri: (dictated Jesse) I am held as prisoner by Jesse and Frank James. They came to my house to-day and took me away with them. If ten thousand dollars is paid in ransom, they agree to return me unharmed. If my friends will raise this money, I will see that they are reimbursed, as I have not so much cash on hand. This note can be taken as my note of hand for ten thousand dollars. The money must be raised at once and sent to Jesse James who will be willing to receive it under these circumstances—Send the money by a single messenger to Devil Whirlpool on the Missouri River about ten miles due south. Leave the money with a woman who lives there in a hut and is known as the Witch of Devil Whirlpool. She will receive and receipt for the money

and when it is in her hands, I will be allowed my freedom and will return home and settle up with my friends who have advanced the cash. Only one person, however, must take the money to the Witch of Devil Whirlpool. The money must be raised within twenty-four hours, or I am a dead man."

"You can sign that now," added Jesse with a sneer, "and you take it from me that if your friends don't cough up that cash, you will never return to this pleasant little house."

Jesse James then drove Goodrich ahead of him out into the street, and ordered him to mount Jesse's own horse.

"If you cry out or make a motion as if you were not going with us of your own free will," sneered Jesse, "I'll put a bullet through you. Frank, you run around to the stables behind the house and bring out a horse, saddled and bridled. Goodrich always has horses in his stables, and you pick out the best one he's got. We've got to ride far and fast, so don't get a plug."

Goodrich knew it would be impossible for him to escape, and although several people passed, he dared not cry out to them for aid. Passersby assumed from the attitude of Jesse and Goodrich that the party was going out on some pleasure expedition, and soon Frank returned with a fine gray horse, saddled and bridled, which he turned over to his brother.

"Come on, now," murmured Jesse, "we will start away and see what we can do."

The two outlaws and their unwilling, mortified and frightened prisoner, made their way undisturbed out of the town just as Maxwell Hyde and the posse he headed entered the hamlet from the opposite direction.

CHAPTER III.

MAXWELL HYDE'S QUEST.

After leaving Farmer Gabriel Hawes' farm, Maxwell Hyde had no difficulty in tracing the outlaws.

They had ridden so hard and fast that they had left many marks of their hurried journey in the highway and it was an easy matter to follow them, but Hyde was somewhat surprised when the tracks led around into the Split Lake Road, for Maxwell, with his ability as a hunter of outlaws, had sensed in a moment, after he had been told of the Woodstown tragedy that Jesse and Frank James—for he had identified the visiting outlaws immediately in his own mind—had been hired by Split Lake people to stop the passing of the resolutions which would practically end in Split Lake's losing the county seat. Settlers in that part of the country would naturally gravitate toward the county seat town and knowing the generally unscrupulous methods taken to secure county seats in these early days, Hyde had figured out in his own mind all of the undercurrent that had ended in the fuss in the hamlet of Woodstown.

But Hyde had not thought that the James boys would have the temerity to return to Split Lake. He had argued that as the entire episode was a plant, Jesse would demand his money in advance, and having gotten it and carried out the bargain, that the two outlaws would immediately return to Independence where they had their headquarters. He therefore was greatly surprised and somewhat disturbed at the return of Jesse to Split Lake.

The highway wound around the shore of the beauti-

ful little lake which gave the town its name, which was set like a diamond along heavily wooded shores, and when he reached the town itself, Maxwell remarked to Tom Halloway, the young man who had shot one of the outlaw's horses, and who had joined the posse, that it would be best to ride back to the men streaming on behind and tell them to close up and form a solid mass, because Maxwell suspected that the reason for Jesse's return to Split Lake was to engineer another of his famous raids upon unprotected towns, and that soon he would hear the sounds of shots and the wild yells of the two bandits, which always marked their careers of blood.

No shots sounded and no cries could be heard. The town, as they entered it, seemed orderly and peaceable. Hyde hurried directly to the post-office where a little knot of town loafers were congregated, and who were gazing in open-mouthed amazement at the arrival of the dusty and breathless cavalcade.

By dint of rapid questions, Maxwell learned that a broad-shouldered, brown haired and brown-eyed man, accompanied by another of slighter build, with reddish mustache, had entered the town a couple of hours before and had proceeded to the home of Burton Goodrich, president of the Board of Trade, and so Maxwell led his men directly to the Goodrich house. Hyde found the front door open, and although he almost pulled the door-bell wire out of its roots, no one answered him. Accordingly Maxwell hurried into the house, expecting to see the signs of a conflict within it, and was somewhat surprised at finding nothing that showed the James boys had been there. A systematic search, however, ended in the finding of the note dictated by Jesse James, and when Maxwell had read it, he laughed in great glee.

"Jesse James is certainly a dandy," cried Maxwell, as he handed the note to Tom Halloway, who had constituted himself as the friend and adviser of his leader. "I have always given Jesse credit for a long head. That outlaw not only has taken the money from Goodrich to turn the one trick, but he has come back after Goodrich and now has him prisoner. I wish you'd step down to the post-office and find some of Goodrich's friends and have them come up here to talk this over with me as quickly as they can. Do it as secretly as possible, because I don't want any talk. Don't bring more than one or two back with you."

In the course of half an hour, Halloway returned with Girard Randall, the postmaster of the town, and Lucas Bailey, a real estate dealer and president of the village.

It turned out that the two men were business associates of the prisoner, Burton Goodrich, and a consultation of war began as soon as they had been told of the capture of their fellow townsman by the outlaws.

Both Randall and Bailey had lived many years in the turbulent Missouri of that date, and they were not at all surprised at the address with which Jesse James had secured their friend and business associate after the first amazement with which they had read the note that Maxwell Hyde handed to them immediately upon their entrance.

"We'll have to raise the ten thousand dollars," said Randall. "but it's pretty tough times just now to cough up so much money. I suppose that I could raise a couple of thousand. How much are you good for, Lu?"

"I might get my hands on three thousand before nightfall," responded Bailey.

"That will make five thousand in all," Hyde remarked. "How are you fellows going to get the rest of the money?"

"I guess we'll have to pass around the hat," smiled Randall. "Goodrich has got a lot of money, and he'll stand good for the ten thousand if only we can get him released. But I hate like everything to have those outlaws come here and do us out of the cash. It's a lot of money to part with."

"But it ain't our money!" insisted Bailey. "We ain't going to lose any of it for Goodrich'll make good!"

"I told Goodrich," came the swift reply, "that he was a fool to send to those James boys. Those fellows will deal with you one minute and will deal with your enemy the next. They don't care two cents who they stick up nor how they do it, providing they get the money. They don't know what fear is, and they'd rather kill a man than eat a good breakfast."

The party stood and stared at each other for some time, until Randall voiced the sentiments of all in a single sentence.

"Have we got to give up that money?" said he.

A smile crossed Maxwell Hyde's face.

"Do you want my advice?" he asked.

"You bet!" cried Randall and Bailey, almost together.

"I don't think I'd give up hard cash until I was sure that I had to give it up," Hyde rejoined.

"What would you propose?" questioned Bailey.

"If I were in your place, I'd get that money together just as quickly as I could," Hyde returned. "When you have it all together, you take a thousand dollars of it and split it into two five hundred dollar bills. Then get some green paper, just about the texture of a bank bill and cut up a pile of the right size and then take one five hundred dollar bill of real money and put it on the top of the pile, putting the other five hundred dollar bill on the bottom of the pile, thus sandwiching the green paper in the center. Then you do up the pile with rubber bands, paste a lot of paper bands around it, stick it all over with sealing wax so it looks real, and mark it plainly as they do in banks, '\$10,000' and—"

"What next?"

"Yes, that's it! What next?" cried Randall.

"Then you make up another package exactly like the first, but with ten thousand dollars of real money in it. You secure some trusted messenger to go over to Devil Whirlpool. The messenger can use his own judgment. If he thinks there's a chance to put the phony package over and secure the release of Goodrich, it will save Goodrich nine thousand dollars. If, on the other hand he finds he can't put the phony stuff over, the best thing for him to do is to give up the real cash. If the messenger has good luck, he may get away with the prisoner and the cash also, but I'll admit he's got to be a pretty smart fellow to trick Jesse James."

"Who will you send," asked Bailey.

"I'm not going to send anybody," replied Hyde. "That's up to you."

As if the remark were a signal for a vote on the question, Bailey and Randall answered in one breath.

"You go, Hyde. You're the fellow to go. You have been chasing Jesse James for a long time, and you

know his tricks better than any other man on earth. If anybody can get Goodrich free without having to give up the money, you're the man."

Hyde turned the remark over in his mind. He did not care for the detail because it was an extremely dangerous one, and yet at the same time, the assignment fitted in with his own plans. He had been for more than a year trying to find a way to track the James boys, and he thought that possibly he could accomplish his purpose by attempting the work of rescuing the prisoner. At the same time he hesitated. The triangular duel between Hyde and the James boys had assumed proportions which would end only in the capture or death of the outlaws, or the death of Hyde himself. If he could manage to penetrate the present haunts of the outlaws, he might get some secret information that would aid him in his mission, and he saw immediately that the only cause for a denial on his part would be from motives touching upon his personal safety, and as he was naturally a brave man, having lived by his revolver, in his younger days, he decided that the best thing to do would be to accept the dangerous mission.

"I will go to Devil Whirlpool," Hyde decided. "I will do the best I can to pull over the prisoner and the money. If I find that I cannot get the prisoner without giving up the money, I will have to produce the cash, of course, but—what's the use of borrowing trouble until trouble comes? You gentlemen here in Split Lake had better go out and get the cash, and when you get it, fix up those packages I spoke of and let it go at that. I will try to accomplish the mission on which you are sending me."

Three hours later Hyde, with the two packages held within the money belt around his waist, was well on his way towards Devil Whirlpool, proposing first to go and see the old Witch whom the James boys had selected as their agent in securing the freedom of Burton Goodrich.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WITCH OF DEVIL WHIRLPOOL.

Devil Whirlpool did not belie its name. It was caused by a stretch of water in the Missouri River which tumbled over a rocky bed. The foam-crested waves seemed to rush down a gloomy canyon, the high walls of which were covered by struggling shrubs growing in reddish soil. The entire scene was sombre and picturesque in the extreme, and there was something unnatural, chilling and forbidding in the landscape, which seemed to penetrate the bones of an onlooker with a feeling of dread.

A few people lived in the little settlement known as Devil Whirlpool. They appeared to belong to the class known as "poor whites," and seemed to have settled there like barnacles upon the bottom of a ship, having no energy left to go elsewhere. The entire population of the town did not number fifty souls, and they were unspeakably illiterate, dirty and poverty stricken.

A few years before, a woman who came from the south had settled in this desolate spot, having built with her own hands a sort of hut from boards which she had fished out of the turbulent river, or from trees which she had cut down with her own hand. She was a woman about sixty years of age, tall and angular, and appeared to have been of some beauty in her

youth. But with increasing years, she had turned into a snuff-dipping, dirty and repulsive old woman. Her hair was gray and entirely uncared for. Her face was lined and seamed with the storms and stress of years. No one knew her name, or anything about her. She never appeared to do any work except to fish occasionally in the river, or to hunt through the patches of woods near her home, and just how she lived was an unsolved problem to all of the inhabitants of Devil Whirlpool. If anyone thought at all about her, it was merely the passing thought of idle curiosity that came to their minds.

As a matter of fact, people in near touch to her were not gifted with the powers of thinking very deeply, and therefore the woman lived out her life unchallenged, no one bothering her particularly, and she became known in the community as the Witch of Devil Whirlpool.

Maxwell Hyde in his work as agent for the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild, knew many things which he kept to himself. He had known of the Witch for several years, and as it was necessary in his work for him to know a little about everything and everybody, he had passed some time in looking up the history of the Witch. Up to a certain point he had learned much that astonished and surprised him, but behind the point in question there was a mystery which he could not penetrate. When he had read the note left by Jesse James, Hyde had quickly understood why the hag had been depended upon as the depositor for the secret so far as the prisoner, Burton Goodrich was concerned.

"There is some inner cord connecting the James boys with the Witch," argued Hyde to himself. "She isn't here for any other reason, in my opinion, than to act as go-between for the James gang. In fact, I think that they are maintaining her here for reasons that I must learn."

In his work which tended toward the abolishment of the James gang and the capture of its leader Jesse and his brother Frank, Hyde had found his trail crossing into mysterious and wonderful by-paths. Hyde saw that one of the great reasons for the existence of the James boys was because they had leagued themselves with people friendly to them all over the environment in which they figured. For instance, in one place a man supposed to be honest and above reproach had been proven by Hyde to be the close associate of the Jesse James gang. At another place, a middle-aged woman who was supposed to have been a small store-keeper was really nothing more than a spy for the James gang, having been paid a stated salary to send information to Jesse of any organized attempt to capture him or any member of his gang. In Texas, to which far-off point, in those days, the outlaws had penetrated, Hyde found that a United States post-master in a mountain hamlet had acted for several years in that region as a trusted agent of the James boys.

So Hyde was not greatly surprised to find the Witch acting as an inner agent for Jesse James, and while he had never known her, at least so far as to speak to her, he began to speculate as to just what he should say to her when about a mile from her house, because he knew she would be ready to greet him.

Lo and behold! the Witch was standing in her doorway awaiting him when he arrived. Before he dismounted Hyde carefully hitched his revolver forward where it would be ready for his hand and hurried up

a little winding path which led to the hut of the witch, and without preamble, plunged into the reason for his visit.

"I am the agent sent from Split Lake," Hyde cried as soon as he was within hailing distance of the woman, for he noticed that she held a revolver in her hand, and one glance at the masterly form before him convinced him that she would be perfectly willing to use the weapon, and would be able to use it with telling effect in case he did not quickly state his mission.

"Well," said the old woman in a harsh voice, "did you bring the money?"

"No, I didn't," replied Hyde. "I brought a little of it with a message."

"Produce your coin," the woman said. "Money talks here."

"Money doesn't only talk, but it shrieks," cried Maxwell as he pulled a hundred dollar bill out of his pocket and laid it in the palm of the hag.

"You talk too much," sneered the Witch. "I want you to know that if you haven't got more money than this about you, you'd better not come at all. The fellows that have got the man you want in charge won't give him up for a hundred dollars."

"I didn't expect they would, but I'll tell you—that hundred dollars isn't for them. That money's for you!"

"I don't suppose that you'd give me money unless I'm to do something for you in return," hissed the Witch. "Now you state your business and state it quick. I haven't time to fool with you unless you're out here for business. I know what I've got to do, and I know what you've got to do if you want to save that fellow's life. So stop talking and get busy. The quicker you get to work, the easier it'll be for us all."

Hyde thought over the next step he ought to take, and he knew that he'd have to speak quickly if he accomplished anything at all.

"Now look here," he said as he drew a thousand dollar bill from his pocket. "Here's a bill that is to go to the James boys. You tell Jesse James when you see him that he's got everybody in Split Lake dead to rights. They are willing to put up the dough just as soon as they can raise it, but Split Lake is suffering the pangs of financial depression. Everybody there has got real estate and nothing else. A dollar there is bigger than a cart wheel anywhere else. You tell Jesse that the man he's got has lots of property, and all his friends have got property, and they're all willing to cough up, but they've got to get time to turn their property into cash. Tell Jesse that the thousand dollar bill was all we could raise on the spur of the moment, but if he will wait thirty-six hours, we'll get the other nine thousand somehow."

"Well, how about this money you gave me? Does that go to Jesse?" asked the Witch, covetously hanging fast to the bill Hyde had given her.

"No, that money is for you. You keep that money and give Jesse the thousand dollar bill, and if he will hold up as I have asked, tell him that the rest will come all right. He won't get anything if he shoots that idiot, Burton Goodrich, immediately, but if he waits he's going to win out on his plan."

"What you say sounds reasonable," murmured the Witch. "I'll tell you what I'll do for you. You stay right here and I'll go and see Jesse. I know where he is, and I won't be gone more than an hour. Don't you be

afraid, but you stand right here and wait for me. I'll bring back the answer and when I do, you will know whether to go back and get your friends to put up the rest of the money or to go back and arrange for the funeral of Jesse James's prisoner."

Hyde watched the woman secure the front door of her hut, which was made, he noticed of heavy timber, and with the inner sense of the detective, Hyde wondered why a woman who was apparently so poor, should need such a tremendous bulwark of a door. From her appearance she did not look to be a fair mark for robbery and Hyde smiled inwardly at a thought which shot across his mind. His shrewd eyes wandered over the hut and he saw that while it appeared on the surface to be made of flimsy material, behind the outer shield of saplings and limbs of trees, he could see an inner lining of heavy logs.

"The hut has been built to sustain a siege, if necessary," murmured Hyde to himself. "Now I wonder why!"

Hyde did not dare to approach nearer to the hut because he did not know whereabouts in the thick underbrush surrounding him might be hidden the James boys or any of their confederates, and he had no mind to be shot as an interloper by some marksman concealed within the thicket. But the mind of the famous outlaw trapper was active and he was trying to secure all the information that his eyes could give him, as he idly leaned against the shoulder of the horse he had ridden and whose bridle he held, whistling a tune shrilly meanwhile.

"The Witch has a good layout here," Hyde murmured to himself. "The front of the cabin overlooks Devil Whirlpool itself, and it would be a brave attacking party that would dare those tempestuous waters. A man bearing a single rifle could keep off a floating army, provided they could negotiate that watery waste, and—what's that road cut out of the trees for, running up to the rear of the cabin? H'm!"

Hyde pulled his wide-brimmed hat over his eyes as if to keep out the late afternoon sun which was streaming down upon him, and then scanned the solitary road which seemed to be making a finger up through the green trees in the depths of which it appeared to vanish.

Hyde further noticed that about fifty feet down the roadway, a great wooden gate had been set between two boulders.

This gate was made of extremely heavy logs, and worked much on the principle of an old-fashioned drawbridge. The gate was confined to its place by a gigantic chain which terminated in a tiny rope, and was balanced by another huge boulder. The detective's mind told him immediately that a pull upon the rope to the right or left would release the boulder so that the gate would rise or fall.

On each side of the gate a natural rocky barrier covered with little fir trees shut off all possibility of a surprise.

"Ten men behind that rocky bulwark," figured the detective, "would be able to hold off another army, should one try to attack from that side. This place has been turned into a fortress. Unless one had cannon and could shell the hut into ruins, it could not be taken except by strategy. I wonder why all this care has been taken? I wonder if that old woman lives here alone as is the popular belief. I don't believe she does! This place is the citadel of some band of criminals. I

don't believe Jesse James has built this place or has had others build it for him. It looks to me as if some outside gang connected with Jesse in some way has built it and—"

Maxwell Hyde, trying to spell out the story of the sheltered hut, now noticed tracks freshly made by a wagon, leading up to the hut and he knew from the depth of the tracks that the wagon, which was not in evidence in any direction, had recently visited the place and had been heavily loaded.

"It looks to me as if a heavy article had recently been transported into that hut," surmised the detective. "Now what article could be taken into that hut that would weigh some tons? If it did weigh some tons, how many men did it take to carry that load into the hut?"

The surmises of Hyde were checked at this point by the sound of a body breaking through the underbrush at the left of where he stood. Hyde knew it was dangerous to turn around under some circumstances, if the action was taken so that he could be discovered. But he was ready for almost every emergency and he drew a small round looking glass from his vest pocket and held it so that he could look into it and see reflected objects that were behind him.

In the round, polished surface of the mirror, Hyde for a second saw the image of a man depicted. The man appeared to be tall and thin. He wore a slouch hat, a dark suit of clothes, high boots, and carried a rifle swung over his right shoulder. The vision was seen only for a second, dimming the glass he held in his hand, and then it vanished as the man plunged again into the brush.

"That is not Jesse James," muttered Hyde. "It isn't any of his band. I know every man that's close to Jesse, and I don't believe that chap is any one belonging to his gang. At all events, I've solved one problem. That fellow was guarding this hut in the absence of the Witch. He probably has had his weapon drawing a bead on me ever since I've been here. If I had attempted to make a motion leading toward an examination of that hut, he would undoubtedly have killed me. It's lucky for me that I know the game of these fellows, or I would have stumbled into a neat little trap. I guess I'll take a smoke."

As he lighted his pipe, Hyde listened intently, hoping to hear the noise of the concealed man as he sank into a new concealment or continued on his way through the brush. Save for the piping of the birds and the steady roar from Devil Whirlpool, no sound reached Hyde's ear, so he seated himself on a rock, still holding his horse by the bridle, and calmly puffed away as if his life depended on the amount of smoke he blew into the soft air.

"I've got a starting point, anyway," thought Hyde to himself. "There's a mystery about this hut that I'm bound to solve. It is the haunt of criminals, but why are they here? They are certainly not here for any good, and crimes that they are contemplating or carrying forward is of a character that requires this solitary place and all of this secrecy and fortress-like attributes. I guess my best play is to sit here calmly until the Witch comes back. Later I can take up this end of the game and run it down. As it stands now, we have got a little mystery on our hands which we must solve, whether it runs along lines that cross the path of Jesse James or not, time can only tell.

Anyway, I've got an entering wedge on this cabin and if I don't get to the bottom of the entire mystery, I'll quit my job and call it a day. The only thing for me to do now is to await the return of that filthy hag and see what message she brings to me from Jesse. Anyway, I am pretty safe for the present, but I wouldn't want to be in the shoes of Burton Goodrich. It will teach him the lesson that you can't deal with crooks without getting into trouble. Hello! There comes the old woman. I wonder what she's got to say?"

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE WITCH.

The Witch of Devil Whirlpool striding with steps that soon brought her to the side of Maxwell Hyde solved one point of the Detective's dilemma immediately.

"Well, what did you find out?" asked Hyde in a pleasant tone.

"I saw Jesse," she replied.

Hyde was immensely pleased to notice that the Witch looked towards the cabin as if trying to discover whether Hyde had attempted to visit it, and out of the corner of his eye he noticed the man whose image he had seen in his mirror show himself momentarily from behind a tree and shake his hand twice in the air, evidently giving some well-understood signal to the woman.

"That chap is a look-out," thought Hyde. "He has told this woman by that signal that I have not approached the cabin, and that all is well so far as I am concerned. I wonder who that fellow is—I wish I could get a nearer view of his face. Maybe among the many crooks whose photographs I retain in my brain that fellow is ticketed and classified."

"I've seen Jesse James," repeated the Witch, as she sank back upon a stump near Hyde.

"You're welcome to the job," returned Maxwell pleasantly. "Personally I would much rather hear of Jesse James than see him."

"Well, anyway," the crone added, "I put your story up to Jesse and gave him the thousand dollar bill and he said—that he would wait twenty-four hours."

"Then he has agreed not to kill his prisoner inside of twenty-four hours?"

"That's what!"

"Suppose we can't arrange the money inside of twenty-four hours?"

The Witch made a motion as if she were holding a revolver to the head of a kneeling man, and then she grinned at the detective with her toothless gums showing, in horrible suggestiveness.

"I understand!" cried Hyde. "I suppose that pathetic little tragedy which you have just rehearsed means that if I don't come over with the cash by the time set by the outlaws, they will murder their prisoner."

"That's what!" again remarked the crone. "You know Jesse, if you know anything about the gun men in this part of the world, and you know one thing, and that is, he'll keep his word! He isn't the kind of a fellow to be fooled with and if I were in your place I would put up the money and I'd get here well within the twenty-four hours. Jesse sometimes gets short-tempered and his watch might be wrong."

"At least I've got twenty-four hours leaway!" remarked Hyde, as he sprang upon his horse. "You

needn't worry any. I'll be back with the cash inside of twenty-four hours. If you see Jesse again, tell him not to get too gay with his gun, because it is better to keep Goodrich alive a while in the hopes that we can arrange the money, than to lose the cash and the prisoner as well, as would be the result if he killed him. Whereabouts is this trail? Do I go straight ahead, just the way I came?"

"You keep right straight down this trail until you come to a big boulder which you will find sticking out of a hill to your right about half a mile away from here. They call it about here 'The Witch's Head,' because they think it looks like me. You know everybody around here thinks I'm a Witch."

"What shall I do when I get to the rock? I remember seeing it when I came along," replied the detective.

"A man will meet you there. You needn't be afraid of him, because he knows what to do. You want to get back to Split Lake, don't you?"

"Yes."

"This fellow will meet you there at The Witch's Head, and he will show you a short cut trail. It took you pretty near three hours to get here, but after my man has put you on this new trail, you can get back in an hour. It's a cross-country cut."

Hyde nodded to the old woman and started his horse at a slow walk in the direction of The Witch's Head. From the height of his horse's back, Hyde was enabled to get a good view about him, but he did not see any skulking figures dashing along in the bushes by the side of the trail in a parallel line to the one he was taking, and he made up his mind that his guide, after he had signalled to the Witch that Hyde had not attempted to investigate the secrets of the solitary cabin, had preceded him to the Witch's Head and was awaiting him there. In this surmise Hyde soon found himself to be correct, because when he first sighted the rock in question, he discovered awaiting him the same man in high-topped boots, black suit and slouch hat, carrying a rifle, whom he had seen in the depths of his looking-glass.

As soon as he had come within hail, Hyde saw the figure advance toward him and beckon him to pause. As soon as he had come up alongside of the solitary man, Hyde nearly tumbled off his horse in his astonishment. His active brain told him that the white face before him, with its two wild eyes, deep blue in color, belonged to a man with whom, years before in Texas, he had had certain dealings. Hyde had not been chasing criminals for so many years without being able to control his face, and he allowed only the necessary faintly curious question to appear upon his countenance as he awaited the words of the strange, wild, uncouth man.

"I am the guide who's to meet you," said the fellow in a low tone.

"So I understand," rejoined Hyde in a pleasant voice. "Say, stranger, will you have a drink?"

"Sure!"

Hyde pulled a flask from his pocket and calmly extended it to his guide. It contained a quart of good whiskey. The guide emptied the bottle by a good four fingers, smacked his lips and returned the flask to Hyde, who immediately took a copious dose of the fiery stuff aboard himself.

"That's good liquor," said the guide.

"You bet it is!" rejoined Hyde, who knew the loosening quality of liquor to a mountaineer's tongue,

and who next drew a gigantic square of chewing tobacco from his pocket and handed it without comment to the guide, who bit off an enormous mouthful.

Thus having met the situation according to the social code of the country in which he was, Hyde motioned the guide to precede him. After he had shouldered his rifle, the man started forward, followed by Hyde, who could not help thinking that the guide was a man of courage to stride ahead of an armed man upon a horse, knowing that the rider could easily have drawn a weapon and blown out his brains in a moment.

"I don't generally walk ahead of a stranger," the guide remarked, as he plodded forward, "but you see I'm perfectly safe here with you, because if you killed me, you'd never get the release of that fellow who is now tied up by Jesse James, and I ain't taking so many chances as I'd seem to be."

Hyde made no comment. His mind reverted to the last time that he had seen the stranger arrayed in raiment and fine linen and seated in the best café in the town of El Paso, Texas, and he wondered in his mind how it was that this man had come to such a solitary spot, but saw that his old friend of the criminal world had not lost the cleverness with which he had always been gifted, in determining whether he was safe or not in the position he had taken as guide to Hyde.

"I think I begin to see behind one part of this game," Hyde speculated as he rode along, checking his horse now and then, when it evinced a desire to go faster than a slow walk. "It looks to me that when I accepted this mission, I turned a mighty complete trick in my own favor. I guess I'll go ahead a ways on that trail, and if I was laying down bets anywhere, I'd put up some coin on the way that I propose to return."

About a mile further on, Hyde's guide paused and indicating a narrow bridle path remarked that there was the quickest way and the easiest way to get back to Split Lake.

"So long!" said Hyde, as he took this trail.

The guide waved good-bye and plunged immediately into the underbrush and had soon disappeared while Hyde continued his journey, not even turning his head to see whether he was observed, because he well knew that he would be watched for several miles.

For five or six miles, Hyde continued on his journey, and then awaiting an opportunity where the woods were thickest, he swung sharply to his right and steered his horse down a gentle glade where in the bottom-land that skirted the Missouri River, he lariatied his horse and allowed him to feed while he himself stole back to the trail, and with a pair of field glasses which he drew from his pocket, looked back along the way he had come, finding to his satisfaction that at least so far as his glasses could show him, he was not being followed.

To make this assurance doubly sure, Hyde selected a tall horse-chestnut tree about fifty feet to the left of the trail, and although encumbered with high riding boots and spurs, he swarmed up the tree and soon was more than a hundred feet from the trail in its topmost branches. From this point of vantage, Hyde could see in every direction, for many miles. His glasses swept the scene and to his intense satisfaction, he could not see anything that indicated his pursuit in the slightest degree. Hyde had feared that when he had recognized the guide, the guide would also recognize him. The detective knew that had he been identified by the guide, he would have been immedi-

ately followed, and he felt that from his elevated position, somewhere or other within his range of vision, he could have discovered any possible pursuer.

That nothing of human kind could be observed by him gave him supreme satisfaction, but he did not climb down from his lofty perch until the shades of evening had fallen and just before descending, he gave himself added information as to the question of pursuit by another long and careful examination of the surrounding country.

"I guess it's safe enough," murmured Hyde to himself as he clambered down from his perch, "for me to go back and see my old friend from Texas, his Witch associate, and try to penetrate behind the veil of secrecy that seems to hide the mystery of that fortress-like cabin. I think that in that cabin I will find something that will be quite as interesting to the Bankers Guild as anything the James boys, professional raiders of banks, could possibly offer me. Still further, it looks to me as if I may kill two birds with one stone. I may penetrate into the mystery surrounding the cabin and at the same time secure the liberation of Jesse James's prisoner and, perchance, at the same time corral the James boys."

CHAPTER VI.

MAXWELL HYDE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

For an hour after Maxwell Hyde had reached his conclusion that it would be the best thing for him to do to return to the cabin of mystery, he awaited the deeper darkness that comes between ten and eleven o'clock at night. He knew that no moon would rise that night, and felt that the deeper the darkness, the better it would be for his mission. So in returning toward the cabin, he made extremely slow progress and often left the trail and rested beneath the shade of a convenient tree, all the while listening intently for the sound of any pursuer, each time feeling better and better satisfied. There was no noise save that of the night owls and night birds coming to his ears.

"I guess I'm all right," Hyde said confidentially to his horse. "Just as soon as it grows dark enough I can make a more careful examination of that hut, and when I do so, I will be able to plan my further campaign."

When about a mile from the hut, Hyde led his horse away from the trail, marking the spot by the peculiar formation of a line of rocks nearby, and then on foot proceeded upon his dangerous and solitary mission. Hyde was too old a campaigner not to appreciate his position. He knew his mission was of the gravest danger and one that any moment might end in his destruction.

His identification of his guide told him that the cabin was infested by dangerous criminals. That these desperadoes were in touch with the Jesse James gang he also knew, and yet in spite of the danger his heart beat high with hope because he felt that he might be able to secure the reward for his life industry in pursuing the James outlaws.

The fact that he was alone, absolutely without anyone to assist him in the slightest degree, prowling around like a wild beast in a country of which he knew little, infested as it was by desperate men, and that discovery meant his death, did not even make his heart beat faster.

Soon a twinkling light through the bushes showed

Hyde that he was approaching the mysterious cabin. So he made a little circle through the woods until he had reached the high hill at one side of the hut, and after a few moments, he gained a point where he could stare down into the grounds surrounding the cabin, and dark though it was, he could see the bulk of several hurrying men, who appeared to be carrying burdens of great weight.

"I suppose I've got to take a chance," Hyde muttered, as he stole nearer and nearer to the cabin, until at length he had reached the wall of rocks which he began slowly to ascend.

It required the greatest caution on the part of the detective. If he made one unfortunate step, and dislodged any of the earth or the numerous tiny shrubs that grew upon the rocky waste, he would give warning to the desperadoes and he knew that in the storm of bullets that would immediately come in his direction, he would probably receive a fatal wound. The Texan career of Maxwell Hyde had taught him caution, however, in proceeding along rocky steeps, and he had soon surmounted the stony peak ahead of him, and began descending the other side. In a few moments he jumped down into the space between the hut and the rocks and sheltered himself in a little hollow, trying hard to pierce the gloom for the purpose of making out just what the men were doing. He could hear the muttering of voices, and now and then the shrill tones of the Witch reached his ears, but the wind was blowing in the opposite direction from him and he could not make out their words.

"The only thing for me to do," he thought, "is to remain here until those fellows go into the hut. Still, I can't help wondering what they are carrying."

At the end of half an hour, Hyde saw all of the figures that had been struggling with their various burdens disappear, and then he heard the heavy slam of the deceptively massive front door as it closed behind them.

"All the rats are in the trap," murmured Hyde. "It seems to me that the only way to find out what is going on inside of that cabin is to sneak up to that little window through which the light is beaming, and see if I can't get a chance to find out what the rats are doing inside of their trap."

Hyde crept on hands and knees to the side of the cabin, and then with all possible care raised himself on his tiptoes and glanced within the tiny panes of glass, four in number, so that he could see the interior of the place.

As soon as Hyde had taken one peep, he sank down to earth again, for directly facing him, seated at a table, sat Jesse James, the outlaw.

At the right of the outlaw, stood Frank James, while around the square, bare room of the hut stood half a dozen other men, all heavily armed.

Hyde remained close to the earth for five minutes, expecting every second to hear the big door to the hut open to emit a crowd of howling, swearing outlaws, bent upon taking his life. But as no sound came from the cabin, no attempt being made by anyone to leave it, Hyde became convinced that his presence had not been discovered.

His foresight in hiding after his first peep was brought sharply to his mind, however, when he heard someone open the window beneath which he was crouching and heard a voice, which he quickly identified as that of Jesse James, make a remark.

"It's confoundedly hot in this place," Jesse said. "I guess I'll leave this window open."

Not knowing whether or not Jesse was looking out of the window, Hyde extended his long form tightly against the side of the cabin gluing himself, as it were, to the timbers, and thus getting deep within the cabin's shadow.

Hyde waited for fully fifteen minutes before he dared to move.

Even then, he did not dare to take another peep within the hut, because there was no shielding glass between him and the outlaw band. But he placed himself in a position where he could hear all the conversation going on inside, and he listened intently, hardly daring to breathe.

"What kind of a looking fellow was the messenger?" he heard Jesse James ask of the Witch.

"He was a tall, broad-shouldered, dark-complexioned man," the shrill voice of the Witch replied.

"What kind of a suit of clothes did he wear?" questioned Jesse.

"Kinda brownish," replied the Witch.

"What was the color of his hair and eyes?" asked Jesse.

"Brown," replied the Witch.

"Did he wear a mustache or a beard?" added Jesse.

"No," replied the Witch.

"Did he wear a broad brimmed hat?"

"Yes."

"What color was that?"

"Gray."

"How many guns did he carry?"

"Two."

"What kind of a horse did he ride?"

"A tall bay."

"What kind of spurs did he have on?"

"Spanish spurs."

"What kind of a saddle did his horse bear?"

"A Mexican saddle."

There was silence for several moments and then Hyde heard Jesse talk with Frank in an undertone.

Hyde strained his ears in hopes that he could determine what was said, but all he could hear was a low murmur, sometimes louder, sometimes softer, and then he heard his name spoken.

The sounds sunk into silence again and then Hyde heard a sentence which made him jump.

"I am sure it is Maxwell Hyde!" Jesse spoke knowingly. "But I don't care whether it is or not. If Hyde will come here as the accredited messenger from Split Lake, I'm willing to accept him and let by-gones be by-gones for the present. If he comes here as Hyde, agent for the Bankers Guild, I will kill him. It's up to him to decide just what job he is going to take on."

"I'd kill him anyhow," cried Frank. "I knew Hyde down in Texas, and he's one of those never-give-up chaps. As long as he's on earth, there's going to be trouble for us. I think you're foolish, Jesse."

"No, I'm not," Jesse rejoined. "If Hyde comes here as a messenger, he's going to put up that cash. What I want just now is money, and if he pays the ransom I have set for Burton Goodrich's release unharmed, that's all I care about just now. I'm good enough with the gun to face Hyde or any other detective later on. The only thing that I want to know is just exactly in what guise Hyde is coming to see me."

"How are you going to know?" questioned Frank.

"We'll know before long, because in an hour or so

at best, we ought to get some kind of a return from Hyde who has gone back to Split Lake to see if he can get those dubs to cough up the money."

Hyde had heard enough. The road seemed to be made easy for him into the haunts of the outlaws, and accordingly he hurried silently away, creeping back over the way he had come with extreme caution, and finally reaching his horse, feeling sure that no spy had been watching him.

Hyde mounted the animal at the end of an hour, and whistling shrilly as he advanced, soon was within a short distance of the cabin in which he had left the outlaw party. His whistle seemed to call into life the crouching figure of a man who had hidden behind a tree and this figure stepped forward, raising his hand just as Hyde came around a turn in the trail.

"Halt!" the figure said.

Hyde stopped whistling and halted his horse, awaiting further words from the man who had spoken.

CHAPTER VII.

JESSE JAMES SCORES A POINT.

Maxwell Hyde knew in a moment that the figure facing him was that of the guide who had shown him the quickest route by which to reach Split Lake.

"I know that chap all right!" murmured Hyde to himself. "He is Long Green Joe Phillips, one of the slickest forgers of government bonds of various countries, now out of States Prison!"

"Come on!" cried Long Green Joe, and at the summons, Hyde started his horse again, following slowly behind his guide.

Long Green Joe led Hyde directly to the door of the cabin, where a broad shouldered man stood, whose close-cropped beard, iron-gray in color, and his iron-gray hair, worn in an unkempt fashion about his head and face, concealed a countenance that Hyde did not recognize.

There was something, however, about the man that seemed familiar to Hyde, and he tried to chase through his memory in his effort to indentify the figure, but except that he felt he had seen the stranger somewhere, Hyde was at fault.

"I knew that fellow somewhere in the past!" Hyde concluded. "His face seems familiar and I've had him in some case, but somehow or the other, I can't place him. Possibly when he speaks, I will be able to indentify him."

The stranger began talking in a low whisper.

"I have throat trouble," he said, "and cannot speak louder."

"All right," replied Hyde. "I guess I can understand you all right. Would you mind telling me your name?"

"I'm called Big Bill here. I had another name once, but names don't stand for much in this game. 'Big Bill' is enough for you, when I tell you I represent Jesse James."

"Good enough!" Hyde rejoined. "My name is Maxwell Hyde. I came here to arrange for the ransom of Burton Goodrich."

"Got any credentials?"

"Yep."

"Produce them!"

Maxwell pulled two one thousand dollar bills from his pocket, and waved them in the night air. The reddish light from the cabin shone over Big Bill's shoulder, and picked up the bills which Hyde was holding.

"These are the only credentials I've got!" chuckled Hyde.

"Nothing better in all the world than those credentials," remarked Big Bill. "Where is the rest of the ten thousand?"

"You'll touch the cash all right some day. As soon as we can raise it. We're doing the best we can on our side, and as soon as we get the money, we'll produce it all, but you see we're having a good deal of hard luck in raising the stuff. Your prisoner has plenty of property, but it's hard to get it turned into cash. His friends have plenty of property, but they can't turn it into cash in a minute, and you've got to be a little easy on us—"

"Come off! We've had pretty near enough of these stories. We can't wait here while you meet your game on the installment plan. I don't think Jesse James is going to stand for that sort of a racket. You've had two whacks now at raising this money, and I'm not going back to meet Jesse and tell him that you haven't come forward with the stuff. All you bring is a thousand or so at a clip, and expect us to wait indefinitely for the remainder of the money."

"All right," Hyde rejoined. "My side's doing its limit, and while we want to save the life of Goodrich if we can, it doesn't look to me as if we could do any more. If he's got to die, the sooner you kill him the better, and we will save our money."

Big Bill did not answer for a moment. Hyde's words seemed to astonish him and yet not to displease him. On its face it looked as if Hyde were on the level, and yet at the same time he might be playing a game of his own.

"Well, now, I'll tell you, Hyde," said Big Bill. "You don't know me, but I've heard of you for a good many years. You used to be one of our fellows years ago, I know, and all the boys say that you're straight goods, even though you have left us. Now will you guarantee the rest of this money in case I can get Jesse to hold off?"

This put the whole proposition up to Hyde in a way he did not like. Like most men who mean to keep their promises, he was a bit squeamish about making one. He knew that if he promised Big Bill that the money should be forthcoming, he would have to see that it was paid, even though he paid it out of his own pocket. Hyde's plan had been to retain just as much of the cash as he could for his Split Lake acquaintances, and if he could not shave off a bit from the ransom, he stood prepared to pay the entire ten thousand dollars, all of which had been raised in Split Lake, and was now nestling in Hyde's money belt, strapped round his waist. So Hyde tried to play for safety, and with a great appearance of frankness, began his reply to Big Bill.

"Look here, Big Bill," resumed Hyde. "I am in a funny sort of a position. I want to be frank with you and so I'll tell you that personally I don't care a hang whether Jesse James kills Goodrich or whether he doesn't! I don't care whether the Split Lake people get the cash or whether they do not. You know as well as I do that I have been hunting Jesse James for three years, and I am going to get him if I can. He has been hunting me for just that length of time."

Big Bill took an enormous chew of tobacco, and in

exact imitation of Hyde's voice and manner, made an answer.

"Now, I'll tell you something, Maxwell Hyde," Big Bill remarked. "Personally I don't care whether you get Jesse James or whether you don't. We fellows all know that the fellow who isn't good enough with his gun ends in getting planted. You and Jesse James can fight out your own quarrels until one of you gets hisn. That's none of my business."

"What is your business?" asked Hyde.

"That's my business. You ain't tracking me down, and I ain't got nothing to do with Jesse James, except that Jesse and I are old-time friends, and he come over here and asked a little favor of me in the way of using my joint in which to perfect some of his plans. I told him to go ahead and pull off any game he wanted to here, so long as he didn't get any of our people in trouble."

"Who's 'our people'?"

"Don't get too inquisitive or you may get shot. You can't put nothing over on us, and I'm willing to say that if you and Jesse want to come together in the next ten minutes, I don't care. All I want to do is to get any message you may have for Jesse."

"Then you are merely a messenger for Jesse and Frank James?"

"That's about the size of it!"

"Your crowd and his crowd aren't in together then, on this thing?"

"Not so you could notice it."

"Well, then, I see where I stand. If you don't mind, I'll get off this horse and come in."

"No, you don't! No coming in here for yours! All I want of you is your promise that you'll stand good for the rest of the ten thousand dollars, and you can hit the high places and get out of this vicinity as quick as you want to with our prisoner. If you come back again, my fellows'll eat you up. Just give me your promise, and that's all there'll be to it."

"I can't do that. All I can say to you is that I'll do the best I can. I ain't mixing up in the county seat fight in any way. I'm simply trying to do the Split Lakers a favor and I think they're having some difficulty in raising the coin. My opinion, not my promise, is, that if Jesse'll give 'em time, they'll fill the bill bag full, and I'll bring it over to him. He ain't going to make anything by shooting Goodrich, and I believe he will get his money if he'll give my people time enough to raise it. That's about all I can do, and if that game of mine isn't going to work, you fellows let me know right now, and I'll get out of here. But you tell Jesse that I'm still after him, and that I send him word that I haven't given up that business of mine for a minute. Now you tell me whether I had better wait any longer or not, because my time is money, and I want to get out of here."

Big Bill was considerably surprised at the tone adopted by Hyde, and he showed his feelings perceptibly. If he could have entrapped Hyde into a promise to put up the cash, he would have been pleased, but he felt in his mind that after all was said and done, Hyde had the best of the argument, and so he concluded to terminate the conversation as quickly as possible.

"I'll tell you what you had better do, Hyde," said Big Bill. "You ride back to the Witch's Head and wait for me there. Either I or Long Green Joe Phil-

lips will come to you before long and will tell you our decision."

"How long have I got to wait?"

"Until I get there, or until Long Joe gets there," grinned Big Bill. "You are only going to spend one or two thousand dollars of your time in waiting for me. But I'll get back to the Witch's Head as fast as I can, and just as I'll get hold of Jesse, and get his answer, soon as keep my part of the bargain as well as I am able."

Hyde nodded, turned his horse quickly and rode directly into the darkness toward Witch's Head.

Big Bill remained standing in the cabin door for ten minutes. Then he softly stepped within the structure, and shut the massive door behind him. He quietly took off his gray wig, his beard, and laughing heartily as he did so, betrayed the well-known features of Jesse James, the outlaw; while his brother Frank stole out from under a table, and laid his rifle down upon it, and the two brothers burst into roars of merriment.

"Say, Jesse," laughed Frank, "that certainly was a dandy disguise you assumed. Hyde never tumbled for a second. But I kept my rifle drawn on him all the time, and if he had discovered you and made a motion for his weapon, Maxwell wouldn't have hit you with that long revolver dangling at his horse's saddle bow."

"I wanted to get a good look at Maxwell," Jesse rejoined, "and have a little palaver with him myself to find out whether he was dead on the level in this Split Lake affair or not. I tell you, Frank, Hyde, while he wouldn't promise to produce that cash, showed me pretty plainly that he was trying to double-cross us. Now I'll tell you what we'll do—"

The two outlaws for more than half an hour, with their vindictive heads close together, talked over their plans, and when they had fully perfected them in their minds, Jesse sent for Long Green Joe Phillips, and gave him minute instructions; after which Jesse and Frank mounted their thorough-bred saddle horses and disappeared into the night along the road leading past the rear of the cabin.

CHAPTER VIII.

JESSE TOUCHES SOME EASY MONEY.

On the following morning, shortly before ten o'clock, President Lincoln Orrin sat in his private office in the bank building known as The Savings Association in the town of Rikers Falls, Missouri.

Lincoln Orrin was a self-made man who had arisen from being a small money lender at Rikers Falls on his own hook to the head of the bank, which, by the way, was prominent in the membership making up the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild, the organization which employed Maxwell Hyde to run down the outlaws which infested the region and which made the looting of small banks their business in life. The Jesse James gang had once before held up The Savings Association at Rikers Falls, and for that reason, a repeating rifle hung over the desk of Lincoln Orrin while near to his hand upon the desk lay two enormous revolvers.

Lincoln Orrin was a man past sixty, with a shrewd face, and it was said of him that he was not averse to taking long chances if he could see a profit at the end of the chances.

Orrin was feeling contented on the morning in question, because a week had passed without any report having reached him of the holding up of any banks in the region about him by the famous Jesse James gang. Mr. Orrin, who was looking out of the window on the main street, saw rapidly approaching at a smart canter, two stalwart young men, and he idly wondered who the two riders might be whose sweating and dusty horses showed they had ridden far.

The two men stopped in front of the bank, one of them alighting, and throwing his bridle to his companion. This man, without ceremony and in a perfectly natural manner, entered the bank door, walked by the cashier's window, nodding pleasantly as he did so, and entered the room in which President Orrin sat.

Orrin saw that the stranger had a pleasant face and genial manner, and although he bore a brace of revolvers in a belt around his waist, this was not at all an unexpected or unusual proceeding, and so President Orrin asked the nature of his caller's business.

"I came," said the stranger, "because I wanted to do a little business with this bank."

"Very good!" Orrin returned. "That's what this bank is for,—to do business."

"You're the President of the bank, are you not?" "Yes."

The stranger took a seat near the end of the president's desk, with his back to the window looking out into the street, where Orrin saw that the stranger's companion had lighted a pipe and was calmly smoking as he sat astride his big horse.

"You see," said the stranger, "I have come on a rather delicate mission."

"That is, you come for some money," replied Orrin pleasantly. "In these hard times in Missouri, any negotiation for money may be termed delicate."

"That might be true in case I came to borrow money," the stranger remarked.

"If you don't want to borrow money, what did you come for?"

"I came to see some securities."

"Indeed? What kind of securities?"

"I have some bonds issued by the Nicaraguan Government."

"Oh!"

"They are twenty-five year bonds made payable in the City of New York, issued by the Nicaraguan Government, and bearing interest at six per cent."

"Nicaragua is a long ways from Rikers Falls."

"That's true, but the bonds are all right. A few coupons have been detached and cashed in by—my friends—you see, I do not own the bonds myself, and I am acting for another party."

President Orrin stole a glance at the face of his visitor, and asked why it was that the real owner of the bonds did not appear and offer them for sale himself.

"Well, you see," the stranger replied, "these bonds are owned by a person who is held in such a position temporarily, that he has not as much liberty as he would desire."

"What jail is your friend in?" questioned the banker.

"I do not really care to say, but he has excused all of the necessary documents to have the bonds pass into the possession of the Savings Association of Rikers Falls, and I feel sure that—"

"You seem to feel confident that the bank is going to buy your bonds," Orrin smiled, "if you have all the necessary documents issued in advance. Now suppose I don't buy the bonds?"

"You'll buy them all right!"

"What makes you think so? Why do you think I will deal in stolen bonds—for I can see by your hesitation and manner that you are dealing in stolen bonds."

"I'll tell you why I think you're going to buy the bonds, and that's because they are of par value of seventy-five thousand dollars. As you say, Nicaragua is a far cry from Rikers Falls, but I figure that even in Rikers Falls the bonds are worth seventy-five cents on a dollar, and as I am going to offer you the bonds at twenty-five thousand dollars cash in gold, I am willing to make a side bet of one thousand dollars with you, that you take the bonds!"

The banker saw that the proposition as presented by the stranger, was an excellent one. There was a good big profit in the bonds as they stood at the price offered, and in case he could get possession of them Orrin knew that he could clean up a substantial profit.

"Let me see the bonds," Orrin asked, as he took a long steady glance at his caller, as if to measure him completely for the purpose of deciding whether it would be good policy to buy the securities or not.

The stranger pulled a package from his pocket, tied with a stout cord, slowly undid it and extracted the bonds which he silently laid before the banker.

The banker gingerly raised the bonds and examined them closely. He read them through carefully, and then turned to a secret drawer in his desk, and pulled out a printed circular. As he did so, the stranger quietly laid his hand on the butt of one of his revolvers, but while taking the action, did not in the slightest degree change the expression on his face. The banker studied the printed circular in his hand long and carefully. He took a strong magnifying glass from his desk, and studied the figures upon the bottom with diligence.

"These bonds are forged," the banker announced, as he did them up in the package and extended it toward the caller.

"Yes, they're forged," the stranger said, in a calm, deep voice.

"I do not want to buy the bonds. I do not deal in stolen property nor in forged bonds."

"You will buy the bonds," the stranger hissed in a deadly tone, while he half drew from his holster one of his revolvers.

Banker Orrin started to pick up one of the weapons on his own desk.

"Drop that," the stranger said. "If you move a muscle you're a dead man."

Although his face turned white and his lips trembled, Orrin made no further motion toward his weapons, but sank back further into his chair, trembling and silent. For three or four minutes, neither man spoke. The ticking of the great clock in the room was all the sound that could be heard. Although the room in which sat the strangely assorted pair led directly to the outer part of the bank, the cashier who glanced in once or twice saw nothing that would excite his suspicion, and the clerks, four in number, who were working at various desks, in no way became cognizant of the deadly play of emotions that surged

in the heart of the president of their institution, only a few feet away from them.

"Who are you?" at length gasped Orrin.

"My name is Jesse James," murmured Orrin's affable caller.

Again silence fell within the room. The banker was first to break it.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to write your personal check for twenty-five thousand dollars in gold," Jesse said calmly, as he reached over the banker's shoulder and took possession of the two revolvers on his desk.

"Yes; what next?" asked the banker.

"Just touch that bell at your right, and when it is answered, tell the clerk to bring you twenty-five thousand dollars in gold in canvas bags, and give him your check for the money. If you dare to cry out or in the slightest degree attempt to communicate with any one until I secure the twenty-five thousand dollars, I will shoot you and I will kill every man there is here in this bank. That is my brother Frank James outside—you have heard of us—we are the James boys!"

The banker knew the reputation for deeds of blood of the two brothers, and well knew of their deadly method in looting a bank. Usually they entered an institution they proposed to loot with revolvers in hand, and proceeded to hold up everybody in sight with a desperate recklessness that made them the terror and scourge of the country. Orrin had drilled his employees to meet methods of the usual kind adopted by the James boys, but here he was face to face with an entirely new scheme. The banker knew that he was powerless. If he attempted to cry for assistance, that cry would be his last. If he attempted to resist, he would be murdered before he could grasp the only weapon now left to him, the rifle hanging over his desk. The banker's eyes travelled towards the revolver, and when he saw the glance, Jesse laughed softly.

"No use, Mr. Orrin!" sneered Jesse. "You'd be dead before you got anywhere near that gun. You see, I've been trying to get rid of those bonds for some time. They don't belong to me. They're forged, of course. I have been here in this bank, you know, before, and I have had a little scrap then with you fellows before I could get away with the cash. I knew that you would have your fighting clothes on if I came in the same old way, so I just dropped in easy like. People around here say that you're not averse to getting a little easy money, and I thought if I could sell you the bonds at a discount, without your knowing that they were forged, that would be my easy way, to some easy money. But Orrin, old pal, you're something of an adventurer yourself, I see, so I made up my mind that if you got next to the bonds, I'd make you buy them anyway. Now you write that check for twenty-five thousand dollars, and you touch that little tea-bell, and get the money for me, and do it — quick, or there'll be a new angel in heaven in about four minutes! You see, I give you the benefit of the doubt, and say 'in heaven.' If you don't get me the money in five minutes, I'll start you somewhere, anyway!"

Jesse pulled out a gold watch from his pocket, and turned an expectant face toward the banker.

"One minute gone!" said Jesse.

Jesse waited until a second minute had passed.

"You've got just three minutes to live, unless you produce the money!" hissed the outlaw.

Banker Orrin knew that he was trapped.

"Don't shoot!" he said, "I'll sign the check!"

The banker drew a check-book toward him, and with a hand that did not falter, made out the check for twenty-five thousand, payable to bearer, and touching the little bell indicated by Jesse, a clerk entered the room quickly. The clerk saw nothing in the attitude of the two men sitting in the room which excited his suspicions. To the clerk's eye, it was merely a customer of the bank transacting some business with the president.

"Bring me money for this check," Banker Orrin said, in a low tone, and in his usual pleasant manner. "I want the money in gold in canvas bags."

The clerk bowed and left the room intent upon his mission.

"Nice weather for crops, isn't it?" said Jesse pleasantly. "By the way, Orrin, if I were in your place, I wouldn't make a holler after I'm gone about that twenty-five thousand. A good many people around here will be glad to hear that I've separated you from your money. I really feel that I'm doing a great good to this community, because unless a lot of people lie, you get your money pretty nearly as crookedly as I do. And I'm going to add something more that may be of interest to you, and that is this—over opposite the bank concealed in a room, are six members of my band. They have a bead drawn on you with six rifles, and if you rush out of your bank in an effort to raise a posse to chase me down, they have been instructed to put six bullets in six different portions of your anatomy! You doubtless know that when lead goes in, life goes out, and if I were you, I'd take my medicine like a good little boy and not cry because it tastes bad. You have no police in this town, and my concealed force will be able to ride away without injury to themselves. I'm giving you this advice freely—don't talk!"

The entrance of the clerk to the room bearing the golden coin which chinked delightfully in the ears of Jesse, interrupted any reply that the banker might have wished to make. The clerk laid the money upon Orrin's desk and vanished.

Jesse picked up the canvas sacks, stowed them away, backed toward the door, keeping his face turned toward the cowering banker.

"By-by, Brother Orrin," Jesse hissed. "Remember my last words—don't talk!"

Jesse walked through the bank, nodding pleasantly again to the cashier,—walked with rapid but not unusually quick steps to his horse, mounted it, lighted a cigar, taking plenty of time in the operation, pushed his horse forward at a gentle lope, followed by his brother Frank, waving his hat in final salute toward the banker, while that individual sat quietly at his desk long after the echoing foot-steps of the horses had died away.

Banker Orrin struggled in his own mind for some time over the dashing and desperate deed of Jesse James. Thus an hour passed. Then Mr. Orrin made up his mind. He decided that Jesse James had given him good advice, and he did not call for aid, nor did he ever explain to anybody how his bank account had been depleted by the James boys, to the extent of some twenty-five thousand dollars in gold, without

the outlaws having fired a shot, or anyone in the pleasant hamlet of Rikers Falls, Missouri, having learned of their wonderful exploit.

CHAPTER IX.

JESSE MAKES AN UNEXPECTED CALL.

"Did you get it?" asked Frank of his brother Jesse, as soon as the two outlaws had reached the open country.

"You bet your life I did! I've got it in my clothes."

"Oh, go on! I didn't hear a shot fired!"

"Of course not! I resorted to diplomatic methods! I didn't go in there to stick up the bank but to sell my bonds, and that fat little banker in there bought 'em without a murmur."

"Jesse, you're a wonder! How in the world did you ever do it?"

Jesse explained his exploit to his brother, whose admiration and amazement was excessive. It was a new wrinkle in the methods of the James boys, and Frank was overjoyed at the success of the experiment. He had been used to the old-style fighting methods of his brother, and he could hardly believe at first that the quiet plan had so splendidly succeeded.

"Talk about cutting melons!" laughed Frank. "It was the biggest thing you've pulled off in years! Just think of it! Twenty-five thousand dollars in a whirl! Let's go over to Kansas City and blow ourselves."

"Not until I get that ten thousand out of the Split Lakers," smiled Jesse.

"Oh, let it go! What's the use!" Frank rejoined. "I'll tell you what we can do. We can skip back to that cabin, and—say have you got anything against that fellow Goodrich?"

"No, I haven't. He's a weazel kind of a man."

"Then, why don't you go over, shoot him and get away, to have some fun with this money?"

"I tell you, Frank, I want that ten thousand! I figured that we'd have to clean up fifty thousand dollars on this raid, if not more. You know this game of ours isn't all easy money for us. We've got to have something ourselves, to be sure, but the boys have got to be oiled up occasionally, and our gang's got so big, it takes a lot of money to do the greasing. We haven't made much money lately, and we've got to make a lot this time. I can't afford to let a chance to make ten thousand get by me."

"Do you suppose the Split Lakers'll raise that money? And that that detective, Maxwell Hyde, is trying to put something over us?"

"That's just what I do think."

"What're you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to find out."

"How are you going to do it?"

"I'm going to drop into Split Lake and see some of Goodrich's friends. If they have put up the money and Hyde has got it, I'm going to do a little personal and private business with Mr. Hyde. I'll nail his hide up to the cabin just as a little lesson to keep detectives away from me."

"Thunder, Jesse! You don't believe—you don't think—you haven't got the nerve to go to Split Lake, have you?"

"You guessed it, first pop!"

"Nonsense! Man, it's certain death to go to Split Lake. Everybody knows you there. You couldn't get into the town without being killed."

"The cartridge hasn't been made that'll shoot a bullet to kill Jesse James. How are we going to know whether Hyde has got the money unless somebody tells us. Do you want me to go and ask Hyde?"

"I don't suppose Hyde would tell us, if he had the cash. Of course, if you're bent on going, I'll have to go with you, but I'll tell you right here that in my opinion if we go it's our finish."

"We'll go just the same!"

"Suppose Hyde should ride back to Split Lake and should warn people there, and we should find the town a hot-bed of fighting men, burning with the desire to kill us. Then what?"

"Hyde won't go back to Split Lake."

"Why not?"

"Long Green Joe Phillips will stop him from taking any such action."

"How can he?"

"It's very simple. You know I told Long Green Joe to go back to the rock called Witch's Head, and to meet Maxwell Hyde there."

"I know that because you explained to me that part of your plan when we were in the cabin."

"Very good! But I didn't explain to you that I told Long Green Joe to inform Maxwell Hyde that he came from Big Bill."

"Big Bill being you?"

"That's right! I also told Long Green Joe to say that he was a messenger of Big Bill, that Big Bill had seen Jesse James, and that Jesse said he would not make answer immediately, but would do so in a few hours. I also told Long Green Joe to add that Hyde was not to leave the vicinity of the rock, but was to remain there until he heard from Jesse, and that if he did not remain, all negotiations would be considered at an end, and that Jesse would immediately kill Goodrich, and would dig out of the country, and that then Hyde could continue his dusty hunt for Jesse James."

"Oh, I see! You're a plotter, all right!"

"I haven't the slightest doubt but that my little game will nail Hyde close to the Witch's Head."

"Did you tell Long Green Joe anything else?"

"You bet your life I did!"

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him to watch Hyde all the time, and if Hyde started back towards Split Lake, to shoot him from the underbrush. It looks to me as if Hyde didn't stand a show on earth of getting back to Split Lake. With Hyde out of the way, I figure we are pretty safe in putting over a little plan I have to make a sociable late afternoon visit to the Split Lakers."

"Do you think you'll be received by a band and have the freedom of the town extended to you?"

"I am willing to give up the band part of it, but I have a way of acting rather free in any town I happen to strike."

Frank laughed.

"Jesse, ever since you were a boy, you've been in the habit of having your own way, so there is no use in my arguing with you. But if you get killed or captured, which between us is about the same thing, don't you blame me."

"A dead man doesn't argue very much, now does he?" replied Jesse, as he punched his horse forward, followed by Frank, and the two outlaws progressed with great rapidity in the direction of Split Lake.

When within five miles of the town in question, Jesse took advantage of a little clump of trees along

which ran a clear mountain brook, and he led the way to this shelter, where for an hour the horses were fed and watered, and rubbed down by the outlaws until they were rested and in good condition, while the outlaws themselves rapidly ate a lunch which they took from their saddlebags. Finally the men started upon their refreshed cattle, and about six o'clock in the evening, entered the little hamlet of Split Lake.

The outlaws did not dash into the town in their usual breakneck fashion, firing their weapons right and left, and attempting to win their campaign by brute force, and terrorizing entrances, but they rode quietly, like two peaceable citizens down the narrow street, which they had taken on their way to the main street of the town, and they soon halted in front of the post-office, while Frank James adopted the usual method of holding both horses, and Jesse strode into the post-office to carry on the sanguinary end of the campaign.

Girard Randall, the intimate friend of Burton Goodrich, Jesse James's prisoner, gasped in amazement when he saw Jesse stride into the post-office, holding his revolver in his outstretched hand. He gave himself up for lost, expecting that he would be shot without mercy by the outlaw, but no such disaster overtook him.

"You know me, don't you? I'm Jesse James," sneered the outlaw leader.

"Yes, Mr. James. I know Jesse James," stammered Randall. "What can I do for you? There's only a few hundred dollars worth of stamps here and not much money. Do you want that line of stuff?"

"Hold up your hands!" cried Jesse.

Postmaster Randall followed the request with amazing celerity.

"I don't want your money. I want information!" sneered Jesse.

"All right! What can I do for you? I'll tell you anything I know."

"I've got your side partner, Burton Goodrich, you know," Jesse began.

"Yes."

"I'm holding him for a ten thousand dollar ransom."

"We got your note, Mr. James—the note you made Goodrich sign."

"Well, did you get the ten thousand?" asked Jesse.

"Yes, to be sure. We raised the money right off."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Who's got the money?"

"Our messenger."

"Who's your messenger?"

"Maxwell Hyde! Haven't you seen him?"

"I have."

"Didn't he give you the money?"

"He gave me some, but he said you fellows couldn't raise it all."

"He's giving you a ghost story. We raised the money almost immediately."

"Then you arranged with Maxwell Hyde to bring me the money, after you raised it?"

"We did, Mr. James. We expected to see Goodrich back long before this in Hyde's company."

Jesse swore a string of bitter oaths. His face was white with rage and his eyes flashed fire. If he had not allowed himself to grow angry, he would have seen a man crouching in the doorway behind him in whose hands gleamed a revolver. In his anger at what

he thought was the treachery of Maxwell Hyde, Jesse forgot himself. He had depended upon his brother Frank not to allow anybody to enter the building, but the man who was crouching in the doorway, and who was Lucas Bailey, another intimate friend of the missing prisoner, had fortunately entered the building by a side door out of the range of Frank's vision. Bailey, the moment he saw Girard Randall standing with his hands raised in the air, and the extended revolver in Jesse's hand, had understood the entire situation. He knew that the man standing with his back toward him and holding the revolver, was the famous outlaw, Jesse James, engaged in holding-up Postmaster Randall, so he drew his own weapon for the purpose of aiming a quick shot at Jesse, and ending his career once and for all.

Randall looked across Jesse's shoulder, and seeing the action of Bailey, the expression on his face altered in spite of himself. Jesse grasped the meaning of the expression quickly, and used to desperate situations, figured in his mind that there was a man behind him, about to take a shot at him, and that he would not have time to turn around before the shot was fired. Quick thinking in times of emergency was all that stood between the outlaw and death. Jesse, still holding his revolver within a few feet of the head of Randall, sank to his knees just as Bailey pulled the trigger of his weapon.

Crash! The shot boomed in the tiny room sounding almost like a dynamite explosion. Instead of striking the outlaw in the back of the head, and thus penetrating his brain and causing instant death, the bullet whizzed harmlessly over Jesse's head and buried itself in the wall behind Randall.

Jesse turned quickly, and before Bailey could shoot again, had grasped his assailant's weapon and had clutched Bailey by the throat. Bailey dashed his fist into Jesse's face and clutched the outlaw around the waist, and the two men struggled as two strong men alone can struggle, all over the room, overturning desks, tables and chairs, and making a tremendous noise.

Frank James started to clamber down from his horse, to run to his brother's assistance, but Randall began shouting for help at the top of his voice.

"Help! Help!" he cried. "We are being held-up by the James boys!"

Deputy United States Marshal William Stowers, happened to be in Split Lake that day and was in the Polka Dot Saloon opposite the post-office when he heard the frantic howls of Randall. He rushed out, firing his revolver at Frank James, and one or two bystanders across the street pulled their weapons and also began firing at the mounted outlaw.

Frank returned the fire from his own weapon, killing an unoffending bystander, but a shot from Stower's revolver killed the horse which Jesse had ridden, and then Frank saw that from every point around him, armed men were flocking, and knowing that he could not further aid his brother at the present moment, and if he remained at his post, he would either be killed himself or captured, Frank threw himself Indian-like along the body of his horse, spurred the animal down the main street, and although fifty shots were sent after him as he flew along, succeeded in making his escape, being but slightly wounded in several places. His horse had been shot five times, although no one of the bullets had entered a vital point.

Jesse and Bailey continued their hand-to-hand contest and it began to look as if Bailey would lose the battle. Randall, however, grasped a chair and began dancing around the struggling pair, now lying on the floor, and finally, when Jesse had surmounted his antagonist and was fumbling for his revolver in the hopes of being able to kill him, Randall managed to deal a stunning blow with the chair upon the bandit's head, and as oblivion swept over Jesse James, for he became insensible immediately from the blow, Bailey and Randall quickly tied the outlaw and their shouts of triumph brought Deputy Marshal Stowers and half a dozen citizens running to the spot. They mingled their exclamations of joy with those of Randall and Bailey, for at last Deputy Marshal Stowers felt that luck had come his way, and he would soon ride out of town, bearing Jesse James, the outlaw, as his prisoner.

CHAPTER X.

JESSE JAMES'S PERIL.

When Jesse James came to himself, he found himself seated in the post-office, bound and manacled while by his side sat Deputy Marshal Stowers with a revolver clutched in his hand, showing all signs of a man whose satisfaction is intense.

"Hello, Jesse," said Stowers. "I thought that when Randall hit you with that chair, the gallows had been cheated. How's your head?"

If there had ever been a man on the face of the earth whom Jesse James hated, it was Deputy United States Marshal William Stowers. The official and Jesse had many a brush in the past, in which sometimes the fortunes of war lay with Jesse, and at other times with the official. Against Stowers Jesse cherished an undying hatred and had sworn to kill him on sight.

Stowers, so far as he was concerned, had no love for Jesse, and when he consented to act as a watch over the dangerous outlaw, he had done it with a full sense of the trouble that might come to him. But he did not think, with a loaded revolver in his hand, and a bound outlaw sitting opposite him, that Jesse would have a chance to exhibit his fearless nature again. The feud between the two men began when some five years previous to the time of Jesse's capture, Stowers had killed Bob Elliott, a well-known gun-man and an intimate friend of Jesse James. Jesse, in retaliation, had sought out Sam Warren, the intimate friend of Stowers, and had killed him. The two men had, therefore, a blood feud to wipe out as well as a personal enmity to settle.

As Split Lake was just beginning to emerge from savagery, there was no jail in the place, and therefore the only possible point where Jesse could be confined was in the rough frame building devoted to the use of the post-office. While Jesse was insensible, a guard of twelve men was picked from the residents of the town, each man being noted for his bravery, and this guard was stationed around the post-office building.

Marshal Stowers, whose hatred for Jesse was well known, was selected to guard the outlaw inside of the building. Jesse's hands were crossed and handcuffs slipped upon his wrists. He was relieved of all his weapons and was seated in a common office chair, his legs being bound to it by a rope and another rope being passed around his waist and tied to the chair.

The gold which Jesse had secured from Banker Orrin was given to the Marshal, and the Marshal, with a desire

to scoff at Jesse, took the bags from his pockets, and ranging the sacks along the floor in front of the prisoner, asked Jesse which bag he would have tapped to pay for his funeral expenses.

Jesse's face grew blacker and blacker as he listened to the taunts heaped upon him by Stowers.

"I thought you were something of an outlaw!" Stowers laughed. "But I don't think you're any good, Jesse! Here you are, a prisoner in my hands, caught by a couple of fellows who aren't even gun-men, and I have that nice little twenty-five thousand dollars in gold—where did you get it?"

Jesse made no reply.

"It's good money, too," sneered Stowers. "Of course, you know, if I don't find out where you stole it—because I know you never had an honest dollar in your life—I get the hoodle. I could use that amount of money in my business at any time, so I don't want you to tell me where you got it. You won't have long to talk anyway, because I'm going to take you with me back to Kansas City and you'll be executed immediately. There's some talk of stringing you up here. The boys think that old Judge Lynch might render a verdict in about fifteen minutes, and there's a lot of fellows here who'd like to see you dancing on nothing."

For more than an hour Stowers heaped his vindictive and scorching words upon the head of the prisoner, while Jesse's face continued to grow blacker and blacker.

Stowers became so enthusiastic in his mission, of self-constituted father-confessor to the outlaw leader, that he laid his revolver down upon his chair, and folding his arms, paced back and forth in front of the bandit heaping every term of abuse that his active mind could grasp upon the head of the outlaw.

Jesse James had very small white hands, of which he was extremely proud. He was like another famous outlaw, Billy the Kid, in being able to compress the bones of his hand into such small compass that he could slip them out of almost any handcuff. In his anxiety to taunt his enemy, Stowers, if he knew, did not remember that Jesse had utilized his ability before, and as he belched forth his stream of abuse, did not see that James had compressed his hand and had finally succeeded in getting out of the handcuffs.

The two steel rings now lay clutched within the hands of the outlaw. Jesse then decided to take some action.

"Oh, let up, Stowers!" growled Jesse. "I know you've got me right and that I can't get away. I'm just as good as a dead man, but I'm going to do you a favor before I'm hanged. I'll tell you where I got that money. There's twenty-five thousand dollars in gold in those sacks and if you want you can take it back to the bank I got it from, and they'll give you five thousand of it, because there's a reward of that amount out for the return of the plunder I stole."

"Where'd you get the money?" asked Stowers, thus checked in his flight of abuse.

"Come over here nearer and I'll whisper. I don't want anybody else to hear among those fellows on the outside."

Stowers walked over to Jesse and leaned forward to listen.

This brought the Marshal's head near to the outlaw. Jesse grasped the steel handcuffs in his hand and brought them down upon the temple of the officer. The blow was a crushing one, and Stower's fell at Jesse's knees, perfectly insensible. By dint of great exertion, Jesse leaned forward and pulled a keen-edged Bowie knife

from the belt of the prostrate Marshal, and then managed to sever his bonds. Almost in the twinkling of an eye he had succeeded in severing the ropes which bound him, and stood up a free man.

With the deftness born of experience, Jesse bound the Marshal and grasping his gun, ran over to a window, softly opened it, and in a moment stood upon the ground underneath. Without the slightest hesitancy, he made directly for the open space in the rear of the building. It seems hardly possible that Jesse could have made his escape under the circumstances, but his action had been so desperate, and so remarkably quick, that without being seen, without even the firing of a shot, he managed to evade the armed guard which surrounded the building, and reached the street a block away from the post-office absolutely unpursued. Jesse was still in a situation which required all his reputed daring. He knew that the moment his escape was discovered, a hue and cry would follow, and that not only would he be chased by men from Split Lake, but he would be out in an open country which had turned thoroughly against him, and that any moment he might expect treachery.

He also knew that Deputy Marshal Stowers would quickly join forces with Maxwell Hyde, and that instead of having one remorseless tracker upon his trail, he would have two.

The outlaw's brave heart did not quail, however, in the face of the tremendous odds against him, and he ran along the half-street half-roadway, expecting every moment to hear behind him many shots as well as the cries of his pursuers.

No sound came, and Jesse proceeded at the fastest pace he could muster, wondering where he could find a horse, because he knew that if he had to continue his journey for long on foot, as soon as his escape was known he would be followed on horseback and would quickly become a prisoner again.

"Oh, if I had a horse!" murmured Jesse to himself.

Jesse was weighted down by the gold, amounting to twenty-five thousand dollars, which he had not omitted to crowd into his pockets, as soon as he had grasped Stower's gun, for he was determined not to lose any of his ill-gotten gains.

Just when Jesse was giving up hope of any further chance for escape, he saw a young man approaching rapidly on horseback.

Jesse's face was wreathed in smiles when he saw the oncoming horse and its rider, and he quickly stole over to a pile of stones behind which he hid himself. When the rider of the horse was opposite him, Jesse jumped out, grasped the horse by its bridle, and placing his revolver at the head of its rider, ordered the man to dismount. The rider jumped from the animal and Jesse pulled a piece of rope from his pocket and quickly bound and gagged the young man and tied him to a tree.

"I ought to kill you!" Jesse remarked to the young man. "It's lucky for you that I don't dare shoot for fear the sound of the shot will direct attention to me, and that I haven't got a knife. If I had a knife, I would cut your throat quick!"

The outlaw jumped upon his horse and went flying away down the roadway just as he heard a shot ring out behind him from the direction of the post-office. The knowledge that he had escaped was counterbalanced partially by the sense that he was being pursued, but he gave free rein to the horse, which he was glad to see was fresh, and of good mettle and bottom, and soon the outlaw heard the shots and cries grow fainter and fainter be-

hind him. But the next moment, he was plunged again into despair by seeing another horseman coming in his direction.

"I've got to fight this fellow!" Jesse muttered to himself. "He's got a gun in his hand! I can see it glistening in the late sunlight."

Jesse drew his revolver from the pocket in which he had placed it when he vaulted upon his horse, and determined to try conclusions with the second rider.

But when Jesse had reached a place where he could get a closer view, he was overjoyed to see that the rider was his brother Frank.

Frank was equally overjoyed at meeting Jesse because he was hurrying back to the village for the purpose of seeing what he could do toward rescuing Jesse. The two outlaws greeted each other with every manifestation of joy.

"Don't wait here, Frank," cried Jesse. "Hurry up! We are being watched. A lot of fellows are pursuing me, and we've got to hustle to get away from them."

As the two men rode along, Jesse explained to his brother the wonderful manner in which he had escaped.

"Did you kill Stowers?" asked Frank.

"I don't know. He's got a pretty thick head. The chances are that I did not."

"Well, I hope you did, because Stowers is as bad a man to have on our trail as Maxwell Hyde. Get the two men together and there's bound to be trouble for us."

"I'm willing to stand for the trouble and I don't believe that any United States Deputy Marshal or any detective in the world can catch us. You're pretty well mounted and so am I. All we've got to do is to keep going, and we'll get away from those fellows sooner or later."

"They'll waste some time in following out clues that lead in the wrong direction."

"That's right! We know where we are and where we've got to get to, and they don't know where we are nor where we're trying to go."

"Where do you propose to go to?"

"I propose to go back to the cabin and see whether Long Green Joe Phillips has managed to stall off Maxwell Hyde and keep him nailed to the Witch's Head."

"There's a country road over there to the left that I think will take us back in the direction we want to go."

"Yes, and there come a whole lot of men down that same road. It's a posse in search of us."

"We can't go that way!" cried Jesse a moment later. "Follow me, Frank."

As the outlaw spoke, he turned his horse across the open country and in a few moments was making wonderful speed over hills and down little valleys, and across rocky heights, in a mad effort to escape, while the posse who had by this time caught sight of the flying outlaws, streamed on behind in pursuit.

CHAPTER XI.

MAXWELL HYDE SMELLS A RAT.

While Jesse James was carrying on his plans, Maxwell Hyde was wending his way back toward the Witch's Head, and somehow or other he was feeling vaguely in his mind that something, he could not tell exactly what, had caused his plans to miscarry.

He could not get rid of the feeling that Big Bill was some one he had known somewhere, although he did not dream that Big Bill was really none other than Jesse James in disguise. But after looking on all sides of the

situation that faced him, he decided that it was to his best interest to proceed to Witch's Head and await developments. The understanding with Big Bill had been that within an hour or two he would get some message from Jesse James, and so he rested quietly by the side of the rock which had been selected as the point at which he would receive some message from Jesse.

Finally, when his patience was nearly exhausted, from somewhere or other, as if he had stepped out of the air itself, appeared Long Green Joe Phillips.

Long Green Joe and Maxwell immediately eyed each other with the sentiments of two men who hate each other and yet who have to meet upon a common ground.

"Big Bill," said Long Green Joe, "sent me here."

"Oh, you're to deliver the message, are you?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't Big Bill come himself?"

"He is otherwise engaged."

"So you were selected as his messenger!"

"Yes."

"Well, what's the message?"

"I was told to say to you that Jesse was willing to wait a reasonable time, if you would remain here for a few hours longer."

The stupidity of Long Green Joe was apparent in the delivery of the message. What Jesse had told him to say was that he was to tell Maxwell Hyde to remain at the Witch's Head for a certain length of time, or until Jesse had made up his mind as to what answer he would return. Instead of doing this, Long Green Joe had done just what Jesse would not have wished him to do, and that was to deliver the message in an entirely different form than his instructions.

Maxwell Hyde, who was a clever man, thought from the tenor of the message as it was delivered to him, that Jesse was not merely temporizing with him, and an illuminating flash came to the detective's mind.

"Somehow or other," Hyde muttered to himself, "Jesse is putting over a plan and they are trying to nail me to this rock. I wonder if I can pick anything out of this fellow?"

"All right, Joe," said the detective aloud, "I'll stay here for a while longer, because it's getting along toward dusk, and I don't want to risk a broken leg for my horse by trying to get out of this place. Say Joe, who is Big Bill? I knew a lot of you fellows in the years gone by, but I never saw or heard of Big Bill before, it seems to me, although I'll confess that Big Bill's face and figure seemed familiar in a way."

"You knew him all right," rejoined Joe.

"I've got a hundred dollar bill in my clothes that I'll give you, if you'll tell me who he is."

Long Green Joe shook his head in the negative.

"I'll make it two hundred," said Hyde softly.

"I'd like to tell you, but it's too dangerous."

"How's three hundred?"

"I'd like to touch that money mighty well, but I'm afraid that I can't do business with you, because if it ever got back—"

"How's three-fifty?"

"If you'll swear that you won't tell how you got the information, I might take the risk for that. I tell you, Hyde, I'm clean strapped. I could use that three-fifty mighty well."

Hyde saw that he had at least interested Joe in his proposition, and knowing that criminals would sell each other out remorselessly if they themselves stood in any danger, Hyde began coaxing Joe, and after he had

pledged his word, that there would be no possible chance for Jesse's ever learning where the information came from, he succeeded in getting the necessary information from Joe, and accordingly he was given a neat package of money, and grinning mightily, told the facts which Maxwell Hyde needed so greatly.

"Big Bill was Jesse James in disguise!" whispered Long Green Joe.

"What!" roared Hyde.

"That's what!"

"And I fell for it!"

"You certainly did!"

Hyde saw that Joe had some further information to impart and he awaited the next words of the criminal.

"I'll tell you," added Joe, "if you'll put fifty dollars on top of what you have given me, I can help you out a little bit more."

"Here's your fifty. Talk up."

"I was told to keep you here and if you tried to get back to Split Lake, I was to put you out of the underbrush."

"Who told you to do that?"

"Jesse James."

Although he was surprised, Hyde could not help feeling amused at the dexterity with which the outlaw had tricked him, and had attempted to arrange for his assassination, in case he attempted to escape the snare set for him.

"You see," said Joe, "I am not a member of Jesse James's gang. I am playing a lone string here with the old party they call The Witch, and I'm sure sorry she tangled herself up with Jesse at all. Shooting up banks isn't in my line. I don't hang out with the Jesse James crowd, and I know you're on the level and won't give me away, and there's nothing in it for me to hang on to Jesse James's plans, so when you offer me a little cash, while Jesse has given me nothing but promises, I thought I'd take the cash, and call it a little side bet of my own. I'll tell you Maxwell, I haven't forgotten the nice way you treated me down in El Paso a few years ago. When you had me right, you let me go, and I'm willing to call all of this a halt, and you do just about the way you please. Only, whatever you do, don't get too far away from the rock until Jesse gets back."

"Where has he gone?"

"He's gone over to Rikers Falls."

"What for?"

"He's going to sell some bonds that I had to a banker over there."

"What are the bonds?"

"Phony ones, all right."

"Where was he going then?"

"Said he was going over to Split Lake."

The entire programme was now bare to the intelligence of Hyde. He saw that Jesse had tricked him completely, was off on a raiding expedition at Rikers Falls, which nearly touched the business of his employers, the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild, and Hyde knew when he learned of Jesse's going to Split Lake, that he was going over there to see whether the ransom had been raised for Burton Goodrich.

"It's up to me to hit upon some scheme to block Jesse," murmured Hyde to himself, "and I think I know a way, if I can only get this fellow to help me."

Hyde looked at Long Green Joe and wondered if he dared go further in his effort to enlist the crook in his plan. Hyde had plenty of money at all times, furnished him by the Western and Southwestern Bankers Guild,

much of which came under the head of Secret Service funds, and he was never asked to account for his cash. It would therefore be extremely easy for him to bribe Joe, the only question being whether he would dare to make the attempt.

"I guess I'll risk it!" the detective thought quickly, and so he beckoned to Joe to approach nearer.

"Look here, Joe. Are you making any money out of your game? What is your game?"

"Never mind what my game is. But I'm willing to say that I'm not making much money out of it just yet. It's a big game and it takes time to put it over."

"What is it? Counterfeiting?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"Any admissions I may make would be used against me at my trial, eh?" Joe sneered.

"No, not exactly that. You know I'm after Jesse James, not after you; that is, unless you are trying to get away with some game that affects the string of banks I'm employed by. Now if you're making counterfeit money—"

"I ain't making counterfeit money. There isn't any money in that any more, because the Treasury Department gets too busy for one's health with its secret service men. We fellows leave all the counterfeiting game to the dagoes nowadays. All the big counterfeiters are in jail and the little fellows are too little for us to monkey with. The coin fellows are all Italians. No, we ain't doing anything that'll hurt your string of banks."

"All right, then, I haven't any call to pinch you, and now that we understand that point and things are quiet and on the side, how deep are you tied up with Jesse James?"

"I told you once before I wasn't tied up with him at all. This is the game of the *Witch of Devil's Whirlpool*. She got tied up with Jesse somehow or other, and I think she's foolish at that. If I had anything to say about it, she'd drop the outlaw as quick as a cat would drop a hot potato. I don't stand for very much of Jesse James's kind of a game. I never was much of a murderer."

"Now, look here, Joe. What would you do if you had a thousand dollars?"

"A thousand what? There isn't so much money in the world."

"Suppose I showed you how you could make a little money—say a thousand."

"Don't talk that way, Hyde. I've got a weak heart! You show me how to make a thousand dollars—but of course you can't. Up in this God-forsaken neck of the woods there never was more than one dollar in circulation at any given time."

"If you'll stand in with me, I'll put a thousand dollars in your fist."

"I suppose you want me to sell out Jesse, don't you?"

"Yes, and no."

"Let's take up the 'yes' part first then."

"Well, the 'yes' part is this. You're the outside man, aren't you? That is, the guard for this ranch."

"Yes, I do all the guarding for Jesse and also for the old Witch."

"Well now, what I want you to do is to never see me when I try to sneak by the line. You just keep your hands off when you see me snooping around."

"That's easy. How about the 'no' part?"

"No talking on my part when it comes to giving up anything to Jesse."

"If you get to talking to the Witch, you won't tell her that you staked me?"

"Who is the Witch?"

"She used to be a queer money shover down in El Paso. You see I—— You see I needed somebody here to keep house for me in the little game I'm pulling over, and I wanted a woman who could do some funny work for me and who had a little money to put into the game, because we had to buy certain things. The woman they call the Witch up here, was running a dance hall down in El Paso, and I got her to go into this thing with me. She is a relative of mine. She put in a bag of dust, and she thinks now she's running the whole shooting match. What I want to do is to get enough to grub-stake this place and get down to El Paso for a little game of faro bank. I've got a system that I'm sure'll break any bank on earth."

"Well then, you need a thousand dollars to get your system working, eh?"

"You're on. You give me the thousand dollars and keep your mouth shut, and I'll guarantee not to see you when you come around, and I'll leave you all alone to work out your own game against Jesse James."

"Is this straight goods?"

"You can bet on it both ways."

"All right. Here's your money."

Maxwell Hyde knew that when a man of the calibre of Long Green Joe had passed his word in this manner, he was perfectly safe in accepting a proposition from him, so he handed the crook a thousand dollar bill and without further word, turned his horse back toward the Witch's Head and waited there an hour longer, expecting to see Jesse James. But as Jesse did not make an appearance, Hyde rode some distance further down the trail, secreted his horse in a clump of trees, and on foot hurried back to the cabin for the purpose of further trying conclusions with his outlaw foes.

CHAPTER XII.

JESSE JAMES WORKS A SCHEME.

It looked as if Frank and Jesse James were about to be captured by the posse streaming after them over the fields a few miles from Split Lake, after Jesse had made his marvellous escape from the post-office in the little hamlet.

Jesse could hear the shrieks of the posse, and every now and then a shot sounded from their ranks, at which the outlaw would laugh grimly, because he knew in the man-hunt in which he figured, that the chances were against anybody's hitting him, who aimed at him from a rapidly moving horse. Jesse and Frank instinctively rode wide apart from each other, and took advantage of every hill and valley, and thus scampered along until they reached the bed of a brook down which Jesse turned, followed by his brother.

Jesse rode his horse into the center of the brook and made the animal walk slowly, although it seemed to Frank that this action was suicidal, because it gave the posse time, at the rate of speed it was travelling, to overtake the two flying criminals.

Jesse about half a mile further up the brook, ran his horse up the sloping sides of the creek, thus making a wide trail until he had reached the top of the bank bounding the brook, and thus getting to a point where there was firm and hard turf in which no tracks were made by his horse. Frank knew his brother's habits well enough to make no remark, but followed him instinctively.

The outlaws rode thus for about a quarter of a mile, and then Jesse hurriedly dismounted and pulled a blanket

off his horse from the place it was fastened, and laid the blanket on the ground. Frank followed suit with his blanket, understanding immediately the ruse of Jesse, and they led the two animals the length of the two blankets and by whisking the first blanket forward, again and again, and leading the horses from blanket to blanket, they soon found the bed of the creek again, and when the horses were standing knee-deep in the water, the outlaws splashed merrily up the brook.

Frank looked behind him as they progressed along, and he saw that the trail was clearly marked up to the time the horses jumped upon the firm turf, and that there it vanished. On the turf itself and down the sides of the bank into the brook or creek the earth was undisturbed, and the uncanny position was assumed which made it look as if the outlaws had made a wide trail up to the turf, and had then jumped into the air and gone sailing off into space.

"That's a pretty good trick, Jesse," said Frank.

"It looks as if we'd lost a lot of time, but after all we haven't," said Jesse. "When you're being chased by a posse, there are two things to remember. As long as the James boys are in sight, the posse will shoot and whip and spur to overtake them. But when the James boys disappear, members of the posse will get a little leary. No man in the posse is dead sure that Jesse isn't crouching along with Frank behind a convenient shelter, and everybody knows how we can shoot. There will therefore be a halt on the part of the posse when they lose sight of us. Then they will come on carefully, and they will see our tracks leading down to the brook. They will expect at once that we have waded our horses into brook and gone upstream, and they will follow us. They will go pretty slowly until they strike the place where we went up the bank, and they won't be sure but that we're on top waiting for them. So they'll skin up that bank mighty slow and then, when our tracks are merged with the green sward, they will begin to puzzle. By the time they've got it through their brains that we've worked the blanket trick on them, and they start up stream again, we will have regained all the time we lost in working our trick. Fearing an ambush, the posse will proceed further up stream, and as I happen to know that this brook, about a mile further, connects with the main road leading back to Devil's Whirlpool, and that our tracks will be lost in the multitude of other tracks on this highroad, we can consider ourselves pretty safe, for when the posse get as far as the highroad, they won't know where we have gone to. They're more likely to follow us in the wrong direction than in the right."

Jesse's words appeared to be founded upon his shrewd knowledge of human nature, because everything turned out exactly as he had predicted. The pursuers lost time and finally were thrown absolutely off the scent, and by the time a few of them had straggled up to the highroad leading to Devil's Whirlpool, Jesse and Frank were five miles away, and although the posse was split into two parties, no man in either of the detachments saw the slightest trace of the outlaws again, and after a discouraging hunt which proved fruitless, the pursuit was given up and the entire party returned to Split Lake, grievously disappointed at their failure to recapture the outlaw they had held for a short time as their prisoner. They found Deputy United States Marshal William Stowers patching up his vocabulary of oaths, and trying to get a new wrinkle that would make mere words fit for the situation.

"To think that I had Jesse James a prisoner!" mourned Stowers, "and then to have him get away from me!"

"You're about the fifteenth man who can boast of hav-

ing held Jesse James as a prisoner, and then of having him get away from you," laughed Girard Randall. "That cussed outlaw seems to have no end of luck, and I'm beginning to think that no one ever will be able to catch him! He makes rings around us every opportunity he gets."

Jesse and Frank, however, while suspecting the frame of mind in which Stowers must be, when he had seen that the posse had gotten only a hard ride and no prisoners as the result of their quest, rode calmly back to the Devil Whirlpool, where they found Long Green Joe seated on a stump with his rifle in his hand.

"How are things, Joe?" asked Jesse. "All right?"

"Sure."

"How about Maxwell Hyde?"

"He's camping down at the Witch's Head, I guess. I delivered your message."

"Didn't Hyde try to go back to Split Lake?"

"No. He said that he was perfectly well satisfied to stick around a while and see what your final answer was going to be. What is the answer?"

"You can go back to Witch's Head and tell Hyde that if he doesn't produce the remainder of that ten thousand dollars in four hours, I'll kill my prisoner."

"All right," replied Joe, as he strode away, while Jesse and Frank James entered the cabin for the purpose of holding communication with the unfortunate prisoner, Burton Goodrich, who all this time they were sure had been lying bound on a cot in the interior of the cabin, half starved and wholly despairing of ever securing his liberty.

There was a malicious smile on the face of the outlaw chief as he entered the cabin.

"I'm going to hector that fellow a little, Frank," Jesse said.

"What are you going to do? Torture him?" Frank queried.

"No. I'm going to tell him that he's got to die in four hours unless the reward is forthcoming at that time. I happen to know that Hyde has the money, you know, I got that information at Split Lake. If Hyde doesn't hand over that money in the four hours, as I've told him, I'm going to take Burton Goodrich out in the woods and shoot him."

"That's the talk!" Frank replied. "Give him four hours to say his prayers in, which will be a good deal more time than the officers of the law would have given you, if you had not gotten away from them back there at Split Lake."

Jesse nodded and with a devilish sneer upon his face, strolled over to the cot for the purpose of notifying the unfortunate prisoner, Burton Goodrich, of his impending doom. The moment that Jesse's eyes fell upon the cot, he gave a howl of anger and fear combined. The cot was tenantless!

"Burton Goodrich has escaped!" Jesse shouted.

"Escaped? Impossible!" Frank cried. And he ran to the cot expecting to see the form of their prisoner still lying upon it. Frank's face turned white when he saw that Jesse had told the truth. No human being lay upon the cot!

CHAPTER XIII.

MAXWELL HYDE'S LITTLE GAME.

Maxwell Hyde, the detective, when he left the Witch's Head, was hopeful that a plan he had in mind and which he proposed to immediately put into execution, would be successful.

The detective argued to himself that with the coast clear, and since his bargain with Long Green Joe Phillips he was enabled to go directly to the cabin without any personal danger ensuing, his wisest course would be to get into the cabin as quickly as he could before Jesse James's return, for the purpose of finding out just what was within the structure.

The detective's idea was that Burton Goodrich was concealed within the cabin, because all of the evidence he had in his possession pointed to such a conclusion.

It was now about four o'clock in the morning and so desiring to accomplish his purpose before daylight fully came, Hyde walked rapidly and boldly entered the grounds around the cabin. He felt that he was safe in the absence of Jesse, and while he had expected that somewhere or other he would meet Long Green Joe, he caught no sight of that criminal, and as if everything had been laid open for his inspection, he found the massive front door of the cabin ajar.

"I'm much obliged to Joe!" murmured Hyde to himself. "He has left this door ajar for me to get in, and is keeping his bargain by remaining out of sight, with the idea, I suppose, that if anybody finds out that I got by him, it will look as if I was fly enough to run his guardship, and that he was in reality on the lookout for me."

Joe had taken just this course, and although Hyde did not know it, the bribed crook lay behind a log, calmly smoking a pipe and chuckling within himself at the discovery which he knew Hyde would make when he entered the cabin. Meanwhile Hyde slowly wormed himself through the doorway and stepped within the threshold. He saw that the hard earthen floor had been trodden by many feet into a solid mass. A rickety table stood in the center of the room with the remains of a meal upon it. There was a portable cook stove over in one corner in which was a fire, and on the stove a teakettle sang, while a spider filled with meat was hissing away, showing that somebody had been within a few moments busily engaged in the preparation of a meal. Three or four chairs rudely made out of branches of trees, stood here and there, and over in one corner was a cot on which lay the form of a man who was groaning feebly, as if in pain.

On the table stood an empty whisky bottle with a candle stuck in its mouth. Maxwell calmly struck a match and in a moment the little candle was throwing its rays about like a good deed in a naughty world.

Hyde raised the bottle over his head and tiptoeing over to the cot, he nearly dropped the candle in his surprise. The yellowish light from the solitary candle brought to his gaze the face of Burton Goodrich.

Hyde gave a suppressed cry and drawing his knife, soon cut the bonds which secured the prisoner, but Goodrich was unable to arise. He had been bound for so long that his limbs were almost powerless, and besides, he had been almost starved during his imprisonment and was the most woe-begone creature the detective's eyes had ever rested upon.

"Where am I?" Goodrich asked wildly, as Hyde assisted him into a sitting position.

"You're about all in!" replied the detective.

"I am starving!" faltered the half-alive man.

Maxwell Hyde pulled a substantial flask of whisky from his pocket and after some difficulty succeeded in forcing a small quantity down the prisoner's throat, and then the detective began slapping and rubbing Goodrich's benumbed limbs, and after some time he managed to restore partial circulation and Goodrich sat up and began to feel better.

"Is that you, Hyde?" gasped Goodrich faintly, when he finally recognized the detective.

"You bet!"

"Have you brought the money for those outlaws?"

"I think I can get you out of here without the expenditure of much money!"

"Don't hesitate about giving up the cash. I have expected to be assassinated every minute since I was taken prisoner."

"Well, it isn't a case of 'die' this time. Can you walk?"

Goodrich attempted to step, but Hyde saw immediately that action of this kind on the unfortunate man's part would be impossible, so without further ceremony, he picked up Goodrich, threw him over his shoulder, and stalked out of the cabin, bearing his burden as if the man had been a sack of wheat.

Hyde felt that he was perfectly safe in thus escaping with the prisoner, because he was confident that he need fear no interruption from Long Green Joe, but he had counted his chickens before they were hatched, because in the next ten steps in the gray light of the breaking dawn, Maxwell ran directly into the tall gaunt figure of the Witch of Devil Whirlpool.

"Help! Help!" screeched the crone. "Joe, where be you?"

Hyde dropped his burden with marvellous celerity and made a running jump upon the witch, grasping her by the throat. He hurled her backwards with all his force, extending his right arm so as to break her fall, and with his iron grip upon her windpipe immediately stilled her cries for aid.

Leaving Goodrich sitting dazed and stupid on the ground, Hyde rushed back into the cabin, bearing the half insensible form of the witch, gagged her with his handkerchief and bound her to the cot where the prisoner had just been confined, dashed out of the door, picked up Goodrich again, and ran with the best speed he could muster back to his horse and assisted Goodrich to mount the animal.

The clear night air and the liquor he had drank put new life into Goodrich and although he swayed unsteadily in the saddle, he seemed to have regained possession of his senses, although he was weak and trembling.

Hyde insisted on Goodrich's taking another drink of whisky and then rapidly explained to the rescued man all the events which had taken place, so far as he knew them, since the capture of Goodrich. The surprise and wonder of Goodrich was excessive, and he tried to stammer his thanks, but Hyde checked him immediately.

"Here's what's left of your ten thousand dollars," Hyde said, as he handed Goodrich a package. "I didn't use the phony package because I didn't have a chance to work it in, and here's that too. Now you ride down this trail about a mile and you will see a trail leading directly over the hills to the left. You take that and you'll be at Split Lake and among your friends very shortly. Let me give you a piece of advice. Don't go to monkeying with outlaws, and don't hire them to do your dirty work. It would have served you right if they'd killed you."

"What are you going to do?" asked Goodrich. "If I take your horse, there's no way of your getting away."

"Don't you worry. I'll get a horse all right. You tell the boys over at Split Lake that Maxwell Hyde has helped them out of a hole. Some day I may ask a favor in return. Now get on quick, because I've got lots of work to do before Jesse James gets back."

Hyde stood a few moments watching the rapidly disappearing form of the rescued man, thinking that it is always wisest for honest men to keep away from dishonest ones, and hoping in his mind that Goodrich had gotten his lesson.

Then Hyde retraced his steps to the cabin, feeling confident that he would get further into the secrets of the mysterious haunts of the criminals, upon further investigation.

When Maxwell entered the cabin again, he saw the eyes of the Witch turned upon him, but he paid no attention to her and began sounding the earth with his feet until he found a place which seemed hollow, and then he began groping with his hands, trying to find if it was possible that this hollow place betrayed some inner recess.

He gave a cry of joy when his fingers touched a round iron ring. This he clutched, and gave a strenuous heave upwards. As he had surmised, a trap door swung noiselessly toward him, betraying a flight of rough board steps, and after he had lighted a candle, Hyde darted down the trembling pathway and found himself in a hollowed-out space, stopped up with heavy timbers.

"The secret of the cabin seems to be mine at last!" gloated the detective.

In the center of the room, which was square and about twenty feet in dimensions, stood a gigantic printing press of the kind used by malefactors in the work of printing bogus bonds. Upon the press lay a great pile of bond paper, and strewn around were bonds of the Nicaraguan government, amounting to several millions of dollars.

A pile of well-printed bonds of Argentina lay in a corner, while several other South American Republics were represented by bonds of a similar character, and Hyde saw immediately that Long Green Joe Phillips and the Witch were engaged in counterfeiting securities of out-of-the-way governments, and the entire reason for the cabin was thus revealed to him.

"This is a pretty good game!" remarked Hyde, as he picked up a polished plate and looked at it carefully. "These people have been bond counterfeitters for a long time to do this work, and they've come up here to escape prying eyes, and doubtless intended to print many millions of dollars' worth of securities, hoping later to flood the financial centers with their product. It seems to me that I remember Long Green Joe as an engraver before he went into business as a crook, and that he was engaged by an engraving company when he was honest which made a specialty of South American Bond Securities. The Witch must have put a lot of dough into this game, for that printing press over there must have cost several thousands of dollars, and the inks they have used are first class, and the engraving tools cost lots of money. I guess Long Green got to the end of his cash before he had a chance to float the bonds, and that was the reason he was so anxious to get my thousand dollars!"

Hyde debated in his mind what action he should take. His work as a detective was merged entirely with the Bankers' Guild that he represented, and he did not see that he had any call to make an arrest of the Witch or of Long Green Joe, unless they were in criminal work affecting his employers, so he decided that in the interests of justice, he would take away all the engraving tools and the more delicate portions of the press which he could easily carry, knowing that it would be almost impossible to replace them with the limited capital which the criminals had at their command. So he made a package of all the spurious articles, hoisted them on his shoulder,

walked out openly through the cabin until he had reached the edge of Devil Whirlpool, and flung the articles far out into the seething waters, which engulfed them immediately.

"I think that will stop our friends from further issuing the bonds," Maxwell murmured, and, as he turned away, Maxwell heard voices approaching and he dodged back into the bushes hiding himself just as Jesse James and his brother Frank rode into view.

It was with great glee that Hyde heard Jesse and Frank exclaim over the loss of their prisoner, and he laughed heartily and half rose from the bushes just as a man stepped directly behind him and clutched him by the throat.

Hyde wiggled around and grasped his assailant around the arm, and the two men struggled backwards and forwards in the bushes with all their might. Hyde saw that he was rapidly being pushed towards the edge of Devil Whirlpool and he fought with all his might to escape being flung into the furious waters. He felt, however, that the man who grasped him had caught him in such a way that he was at a terrible disadvantage. Although he fought like a wild cat in a trap, he felt himself raised bodily and, while he tried in every way to avert the impending disaster, felt himself hurled head foremost into the terrible Devil Whirlpool in which he knew he feared that he must dash to death.

He felt the grip upon his throat growing tighter and tighter, and suddenly he gave a terrible cry as he hurtled backward into the dreadful rushing foam beneath him.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAXWELL HYDE'S TERRIBLE FALL.

With shrieks of agony, Hyde disappeared into the waters of Devil Whirlpool.

"My last hour has come," murmured the detective, as the waters closed over his head.

The detective was borne along like a cork, each moment expecting that his brains would be dashed out by the rocks which stuck out in the water, and how he evaded instant death was indeed a miracle. He could hear around him the roar of the waves, and his body was whirled hither and thither by the turbulent water and he seemed absolutely powerless to make a motion. Gasping for breath, he felt himself within the resistless grasp of some giant force which he could not overcome. In the first hundred feet of his terrible progress, Hyde was as near death by drowning as it was possible for a man to become and yet live. His breath seemed to be driven out of his body as he was swept along, and if it had not been for the fact that the waves occasionally tossed him up into the air, and his groaning lungs succeeded in relieving themselves, he would have been strangled immediately. Hyde, however, when he found that death was not to be his immediate portion, began beating the waves with his stalwart arms, and managed to keep himself partially afloat for a time. He saw that his only possible chance for life lay in his attempting to get into calmer waters nearer the shore, and as he sped along, he tried in every way to reach a point where he could buffet the waves more successfully, and at length with a cry of joy, he succeeded in getting into still waters, although still far from being out of danger. His effort along this line a hundred feet further down the stream was aided by a large rock over which the waters foamed and beat.

The waters were thus deflected a little to the right, and in their tremendous force, they had hollowed out a space

in the solid rock itself, and for this point Hyde directed all his energy. If he could reach the comparative stillness underneath the rocky bluff, he felt he might have a slight chance for life. But directly ahead of him stuck out a huge rock, against which he was being directly borne, and he knew that if he ever struck it, he would be cut to bits instantaneously.

"Can I escape that rock?" came the thought to the detective's mind. "If I can, I may save my life yet."

On the other hand, the strength of Hyde was rapidly waning. In the choking swirl of water in which breathing had been almost impossible, he had been so beaten by the waves that he was as weak as a child. On the other hand, he dared not get very near the shore, for he feared that Jesse James, who had flung him into the whirlpool, was crouching on the bank above him, trying to catch sight of his form for the purpose of shooting him. But he saw he must take one of the two horns of the dilemma in which he found himself.

He had made up his mind when he was first grasped, that he had been detected by Jesse James in his effort at hiding when Jesse had rushed out from the cabin, after his discovery of the escape of the prisoner, and that Jesse had immediately surmised that the prisoner had been loosed by Hyde and had softly stolen over to where Hyde was supposedly safely concealed, and, grappling with him, had flung him into the depths of Devil Whirlpool.

Hyde, therefore, decided that he must take the chance of being shot by Jesse from the cliffs above, or perish in the waters in which he was struggling. He had no other course to pursue, so he turned over on his back and began treading water, allowing himself to be whirled further down the tossing waves, and at length, just as he was about to be dashed upon the great rock in his path, he called upon the last ounce of his remaining energy and managed to reach the point he had aimed for, and with a few feeble strokes, succeeded in grasping the root of a tree protruding out into the water; hanging there suspended, holding fast with the strength of a dying man, until he found sufficient strength to drag himself upon the shore, where a sudden blackness overcame him and he fainted upon the shore.

Hyde's out-of-door life had given him wonderful strength, and his recuperative powers soon enabled him to sit up feebly, and at length he crawled further up the bank, and for an hour lay trying to regain his strength and also to make plans as to his future course.

Hyde's indomitable grit stood him in good stead, and he soon managed to crawl further up the bank and to take some bearings as to his position. He found himself about two miles further down the river from the cabin where Jesse James had discovered him, and at length he was enabled to totter feebly to his feet, and he began to crawl backwards as well as he could, determined to fight out conclusions with Jesse, even though he lost his life in the attempt.

While the detective was hurrying back as well as he was able towards the cabin, Jesse James, his lips covered with foam and beside himself with rage, was shrieking for Long Green Joe.

After Maxwell Hyde had left the cabin with Burton Goodrich, Long Green Joe had returned to it and liberated the Witch, so that when Jesse had re-entered the cabin, he had found it tenantless. The shock of the discovery was so great that Jesse had flung out of the cabin and so had found Hyde as he crept to his place of fancied security. He had hurried over, intent upon murdering Hyde,

but had been grappled so quickly by the detective, that his intent to shoot Hyde had failed, but he had managed to throw Hyde in the Devil Whirlpool, and felt sure that he had ended the life of the detective, and feeling that one enemy was out of the way, and suspecting treachery on the part of Long Green Joe, Jesse rushed hither and thither in his mad endeavor to find the man whom he suspected of selling him out, and just as he did so, Joe appeared walking briskly along, not knowing anything of the tragedy that had taken place at the Whirlpool, and hoping to throw Jesse off the scent.

"How did Maxwell Hyde get here?" howled Jesse, the moment he saw Long Green Joe.

"I don't know. I didn't know he had been here. I have seen nothing of him since I left him at the Witch's Head."

"You're a liar!" yelled Jesse.

Jesse drew his revolver as he spoke, while a cold gleam shot into his eyes, and a smile of malice and wrath wreathed his lips.

Long Green Joe knew in a moment what that expression on the face of the outlaw meant, and without a word he drew his own weapon and fired directly at the outlaw's head.

There was a second between the shot of Long Joe and that of Jesse James, which followed the first shot closely.

Long Joe's shot, however, whistled idly by Jesse James's head, without striking, while the deadly aim of the outlaw ended in a terrible manner. It struck Joe directly between his eyes and wormed its way through his brain, and the unfortunate criminal threw up his hands, gave a gurgling cry of agony and plunged forward upon his face. His limbs twitched once or twice, a great pool of blood trickled from his head, and at length with a sobbing sound, as his breath was expelled from his lungs, lay a sprawling mass of dead flesh, a victim of the deadly revolver of the outlaw, Jesse James.

With the sound of this shot, there came running down the path the tall, gaunt figure of the Witch of Devil Whirlpool. Her gray hair was flying in the air and she was shrieking like a madwoman.

"You've killed my son!" she howled, shaking her fist at Jesse James. "My curses rest upon your head! I warn ye now that you'll die some day just the same way ye've killed my boy! Remember the warning of the Witch of Devil Whirlpool!"

Distraught with her agony and mad with grief, the old woman made no attempt to attack Jesse James nor his brother Frank, who stood behind him, laughing mercilessly at the havoc his brother's revolver shot had wrought, but she ran straight to the Devil Whirlpool, and with a terrible cry of hatred, jumped boldly into the water and disappeared from view.

"Let the old hag go!" bawled Jesse, as he shook his fist in her direction, while his brother Frank ran to the brink of the whirling waters, pulling his revolver with the intention of shooting at the form of the woman as soon as it appeared on the surface of the water.

For a few moments nothing was seen of the form of the Witch.

Then the woman emerged from the waters and her body struck with a terrible thud against a jutting rock, and she feebly crawled upon it and stood poised a moment, a terrible figure.

Frank James raised his revolver and took deadly aim at the figure standing on the inclined rock.

"My last warning!" shrieked the Witch, hurling her-

self out again into the raging pool, as she saw Frank James taking aim with his revolver.

Although it was plain that the Witch had been crazed by the death of her son, there was no mercy in the heart of Frank James. His laugh could be heard high above the foaming beat of the waters, and his revolver gave a sharp crack as he pressed the trigger.

The bullet struck the body of the unfortunate woman, and she began rolling back into the water, half out of which she lay, but just before she was submerged she raised her hand, and even the hardened outlaws could not help shuddering at the implacable hatred which shone on the dying woman's face.

"You will die by an assassin's bullet, Jesse James!" she shrieked, "just the way you killed my son! My last warning!"

The Witch's head fell forward on her breast and her half-submerged body seemed to yield itself to the elements and she rolled face forward once more back into the waters and disappeared, to be seen no more.

"Curse her!" yelled Jesse James, shaking his fist at the point in the water where the unfortunate woman had died. "We have still all the gold that I would have had to divide with that dead man there, and although we have lost our prisoner, we win. Frank, go get our horses, and let's get out of here quick! We have a long journey ahead of us yet to-night. Anyway, I've got rid of Maxwell Hyde forever."

CHAPTER XV.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

"No, you have not escaped yet!" hissed a voice behind the outlaw leader, the moment Frank James had disappeared in the direction of the two horses of the outlaws.

The speaker was Maxwell Hyde, who had regained his strength and returned to the cabin and now stood with a revolver in his hand with which he had drawn a bead on the form of Jesse.

Jesse James, quick in gun-play, thrust his hand into the pocket of his coat into which he had inserted his revolver after he had killed Long Green Joe, and fired a shot through the lining of the coat, and it went upon its way toward the form of the detective.

The bullet, however, was slightly deflected in its course by the lining of the coat, and although it was aimed at the broad breast of the detective, it did not strike him there, but instead struck him on the hand which grasped his revolver. The pain of the bullet as it entered his hand, caused the detective to involuntarily throw his hand into the air, at the same time pressing his trigger finger hard upon the trigger, and his shot went aimlessly in the air.

Although he had been wounded, Hyde's presence of mind did not desert him, and with the trained sense of the true gun-fighter, he sank to the earth, throwing his revolver towards his left hand as he did so, and with the same motion firing his gun at Jesse, who at the same time dodged behind a tree.

This second of time, as Jesse disappeared to cover, allowed Maxwell Hyde to imitate the outlaw.

Maxwell's hand was bleeding and the pain of the wound was excessive, but he heard Frank James coming crashing back up the trail, and Maxwell awaited a chance to get a shot at Frank by peeping around the tree, behind which he had shielded himself.

With his left hand, Maxwell took a flying shot at Frank, and yelled in triumph when he saw Frank stagger

back with a bullet in his shoulder. Maxwell, however, exposed himself a trifle in his anxiety to kill Frank James, and this gave Jesse James a chance to lodge another shot in Maxwell's left arm between the shoulder and the elbow.

The triangular duel thus began!

All three men were trained in all the arts of border warfare, and they shot rapidly at each other until the woods rang with the detonation of their weapons, and the odor of gun-powder became stifling in the little spot where the battle was being waged.

Maxwell Hyde lay quietly along the roots of the tree and every now and then blazed away with his revolver, the two outlaws replying in kind, and thus for half an hour one of the fiercest little battles of the frontier of those days waxed and waned.

Jesse James was slightly wounded twice in the first half hour, Maxwell Hyde receiving a third wound, while Frank remained unharmed further.

The wounds that each man had received, while not mortal, were sufficiently painful, and had they been received by an ordinary man, the battle would have been over long before it finally terminated.

In a fight with revolvers, Hyde had slightly the best of it. As has been said before, his early life had been passed in Texas, where gun fighting was reduced to a fine art, while the outlaws, themselves crack shots, had been used to shooting at men with the advantage all on their side. Here they were facing an enemy who had well covered himself, and as time progressed, Jesse began to think that the fight was not worth the candle.

Jesse accordingly wormed himself through the underbrush, and when he did so, Maxwell Hyde took several flying shots at him, but without succeeding in hitting him, and Jesse at length got into a position where he could communicate his intentions to his brother.

"I think we better dust out of here, Frank," said Jesse. "Hyde is hidden behind that tree and is too good a shot for us to risk trying to surround him in any

way, and I will take the first chance we get to make a sneak."

"How are you going to do it?"

"You blaze away at Hyde as fast as you can. Of course, you can't hit him, the way he is lodged, but you put as many bullets at him as you can, and I'll get the horses ready."

Following these tactics, Jesse hurried back to his horses and got them ready for a journey; whistled shrilly at Frank to announce this fact. Frank continued to pour lead at Maxwell Hyde, to which Hyde retorted in kind, and was thus able to trick the detective. The outlaws, when their horses were ready, ceased firing, and mounted their steeds and dashed over the trail, bearing with them the gold coin they had looted from the Ricker's Falls bank, in the canvas bags, and made their escape.

The cessation of shots made Hyde suspicious, but he dared not crawl out of his position of vantage for several moments. When he did so, he discovered the trick which had been played upon him, and his face was back with rage when he sat down on a stump and began binding up his wounds, knowing that he would have to walk back to Split Lake for medical assistance.

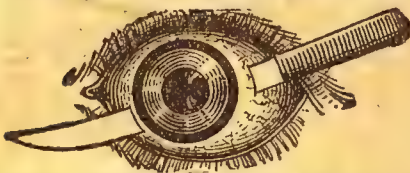
"I will not forget the dying curse of the Witch of Devil Whirlpool!" shouted Hyde, as he shook his fist in the direction taken by the fleeing outlaws. "If I am killed in the attempt, I will yet secure my revenge. My duel with Jesse James and his brother Frank has not yet ended."

THE END.

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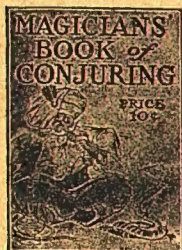
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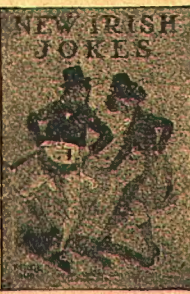
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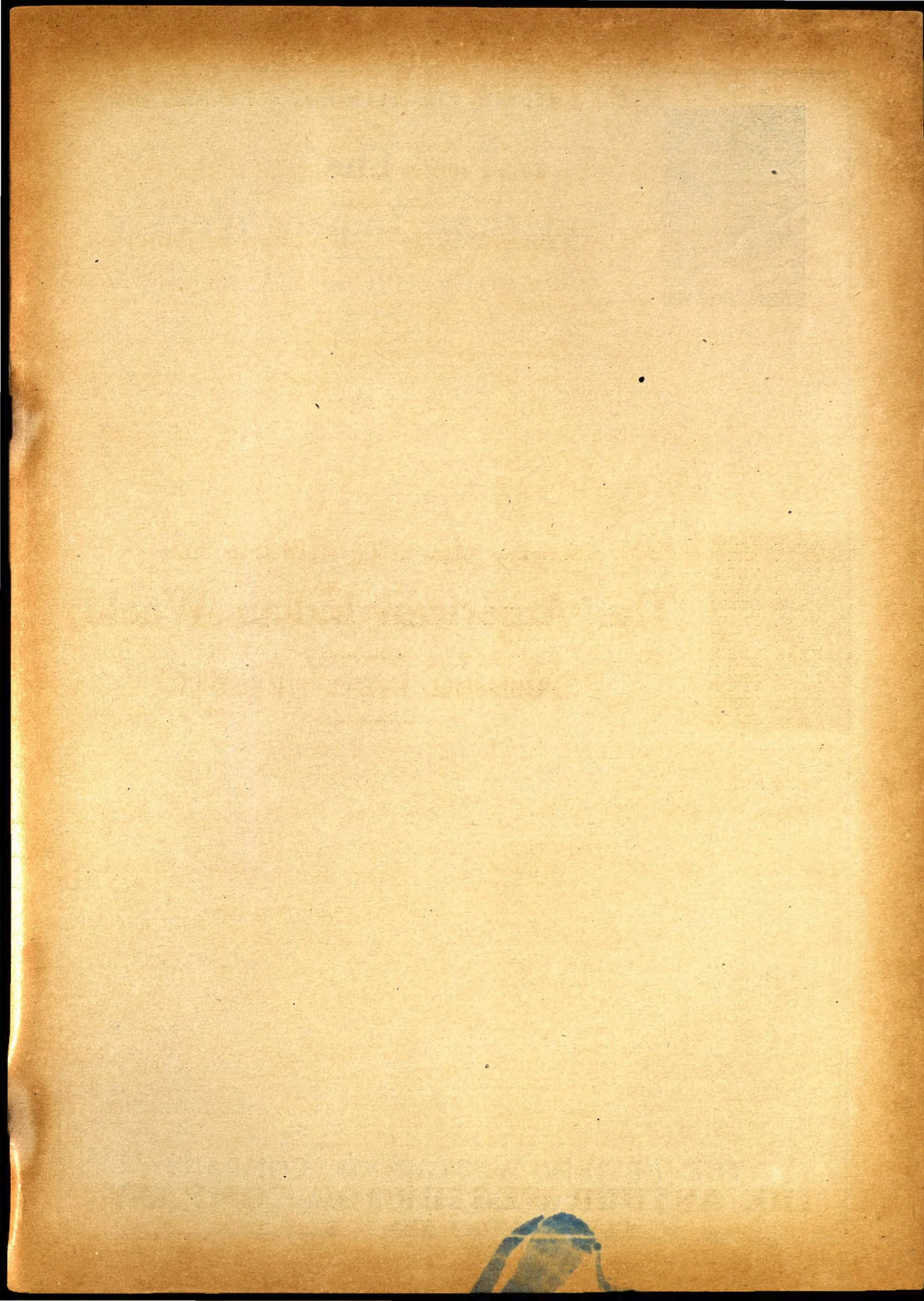
A new number is issued every Thursday.

LIST OF TITLES

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| No. 1. | THE OUTLAW'S PLEDGE | or the Raid on the Old Stockade |
| No. 2. | TRACKED TO HIS LAIR | or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider |
| No. 3. | THE BLACK DEATH | or The Curse of the Navajo Witch |
| No. 4. | THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGE | or Kidnapped by the Piutes |
| No. 5. | TRAPPED BY THE CREES | or Tricked by a Renegade Scout |
| No. 6. | BETRAYED BY A MOCCASIN | or The Round-up of the Indian Smugglers |
| No. 7. | FLYING CLOUD'S LAST STAND | or The Battle of Dead Man's Canyon |
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| No. 9. | THE DECOY MESSAGE | or The Ruse of the Border Jumpers |
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| No. 13. | STAGE COACH BILL'S LAST RIDE | or The Bandits of Great Bear Lake |
| No. 14. | THE TRAGEDY OF HANGMAN'S GULCH | or The Ghost of Horn Mountains |
| No. 15. | THE TREASURES OF MACKENZIE ISLES | or The Outlaw's Drag-Net |
| No. 16. | HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN | or The Renegade's Death-Vote |
| No. 17. | THE MAIL RIDER'S DASH WITH DEATH | or The Desperado of Poker Flat |
| No. 18. | THE RED MASSACRE | or The Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands |
| No. 19. | THE MYSTERY OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE | or The Robbers' Round-Up |
| No. 20. | HOUNDED BY RED MEN | or The Road Agents of Porcupine River |
| No. 21. | THE FUR TRADER'S DISCOVERY | or The Brotherhood of Thieves |
| No. 22. | THE SMUGGLERS OF LITTLE SLAVE LAKE | or The Trapper's Vengeance |
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| No. 28. | THE DOOM OF THE BANDED BROTHERS | or The Demon Renegades |
| No. 29. | THE WITCH OF DEVIL WHIRLPOOL | or The Gun-Men of Split Lake |
| No. 30. | TORNADO BESS THE KIDNAPPER | or The Outlaws of Rabbit Island |
| No. 31. | THE WRECKERS OF CARIBOU REEF | or Border Bandits at Bay |
| No. 32. | THE PLAGUE SPREADERS OF HUNGRY TRAIL | or The Robbers of Little Wind |
| No. 33. | TRAIN WRECKERS OF THE WEST | or The Gold Mountain Hold-up |
| No. 34. | THE SAFE CRACKERS' LEAGUE | or Robbed of Millions |
| No. 35. | THE OUTLAW BROTHERS | or The Train Robbers' Bold Dash |
| No. 36. | THE RED CUT RAID | or The Express Agent's Peril |

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| June 1— | No. 27. | THE CURSE OF CORONATION GULF..... | or The Outlaws of Blue Waters |
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